

An Official Journal of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee, India

# THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build

Rationalist Society

Issue - 4



Vol.- 15

Jan – Apr 2016

## *In this issue...*

- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| 2. Two Years after That Dark Day...             | <i>Vinayak Savale</i>     |
| 4. Harrowing Experience of Kanifnath Fair       | <i>Prabha Purohit</i>     |
| 7. Herd Mentality in Politics                   | <i>Pervez Hoodbhoy</i>    |
| 9. Death of an Author                           | <i>Vishram Gupte</i>      |
| 12. Real Tribute to Jawaharlal Nehru            | <i>Kumar Ketkar</i>       |
| 17. Be an Enlightened Hindu                     | <i>Keshav Shet</i>        |
| 22. Holy Cow-Beef and Indian Political Games    | <i>Ram Puniyani</i>       |
| 24. The Social Watch                            | <i>Dr Rajeev Joshi</i>    |
| 27. Intolerance has a Name..                    | <i>Aakar Patel</i>        |
| 28. What a Common Muslim thinks of ISIS Terror? | <i>Motiur Rahman Khan</i> |
| 31. Impact of Superstitions on Children         | <i>Jenni Wallis</i>       |

**Founder**  
**Dr. Narendra Dabholkar**  
**(1945-2013)**

**Editors:**  
**P.K. Nanawaty**  
**Ms Suman Oak**

email. [pkn.ans@gmail.com](mailto:pkn.ans@gmail.com)

[www.thoughtnaction.co.in](http://www.thoughtnaction.co.in)

## Two Years after That Dark Day...

*Vinayak Savale*

*A letter to Late Dr. Narendra Dabholkar.....*

Dear Doctor,

Two years after that dark day, our organisation is bravely fighting against the brazen government machinery and the intense darkness of superstitions, carrying the torch of the thought you gave us. With our hearts full of grief and anger we have not deviated from the path of reason and sanity and are fighting united, helping each other not to lose faith and courage. Your killers could not kill your thought or stop it spreading by the day.

We have stood together encouraging each other and working harder than ever. Here is an account of the last two years- our achievements and the narrative of how ANS faced the challenges before it.

The first challenge before us was that of getting the anti-superstition law enacted by the Legislative Assembly. Doctor, you had fought for it for all of 18 years and you finally laid down your life. But immediately after your assassination, people were so enraged that the government had to hurriedly issue an anti-superstition ordinance; it was now necessary to convert it into a law or else it would lapse. The atmosphere was conducive but government was still dilly-dallying. Avinash Patil who trained under you, drew an effective strategy to keep the heat on the Government through communication, dialogue, demonstrations, agitation, protests, campaigns and what not. Finally the law was passed; we were witnessing the procedure from the gallery and hugged each other with joy; but at what price! We have learned a lot from this experience. Since then about two hundred anti-superstition cases have been filed. In one case the accused have been convicted. Moreover, now the Government on its own is publicizing it through 'Janasanvad Yatra'. We have criss-crossed the whole state to educate people regarding the law and with the help of the Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Centre, Pune, we have organised many training centres all over the state.

Doctor, another such success was gained in the fight against the 'Jaat Panchayat' (Caste & Community Council) system. The supreme leaders of the Vaidu community have decided to dismantle their Panchayats. Accordingly thousands of Jaat Panchayat meetings have been cancelled. This has opened a new panorama and volunteers from many nomadic tribes are joining us. After the first conference, 'put an end to Jaat Panchayat' where you were present, we have successfully held meetings at various places such as Jalgaon, Latur, Mahad, Mumbai where all those who suffered at the hands of their Jaat Panchayats gave vent to their grievances, throwing light on various aspects of this atrocious institution.

I assure you dear Doctor, we, your enthusiastic followers, though stunned by the shock of your loss, did not keep wailing over it. The pain in our hearts has produced novel ideas of disseminating your message. One of them is 'Ringan Natya' (a kind of street play) organized by Atul Pethe, a famous

personality in experimental theatre. This novel activity not only enriched the cultural aspect but also provided an opportunity to our activists to give vent to their suffering, defiance and condemnation of the heinous crime. By now we have been able to organize ten groups performing Ringan Natya. The Islamapur group has developed a very powerful dramatic piece, 'Socrates to Dabholkar- Pansare via Tukaram'. The audience are greatly moved by it and after watching the show are determined not to let the sane thought of these great men die. This play was enacted at the Gandhi Memorial in Delhi establishing its connection with Gandhiji's thought. Other similar groups from Pimpri-Chinchwad, Pune and Kolhapur are equally active in spreading your message.

Another dream of yours -possessing a 'Digital Planetarium' of our own, too costly for us to afford earlier, has now materialized. Dr. Atish Dabholkar persuaded the renowned scientist, Dr. Ashok Sen to give us a generous donation for the long desired planetarium. The new planetarium is making us proud and is helping students to make an amazing tour of the skies.

We can assure you dear Doctor, that our organization's business is alive and well. Regular meetings are held at state and district levels. Other programmes like 'Nirdhar Melave', and conferences are organized frequently and efficiently. Every activist is alert and leaves no stone unturned, so that the organization always remains in the front of every progressive movement. All these are just the most important achievements. The full list of other major and minor ones is rather long.

Many people are astonished to see our organization running smoothly with renewed vigour despite our grievous loss. You have already answered this doubt in your article, 'From where does all this come?' You said, 'The pristine spring emanates from you, the activists, from your urge to do good to society. Your thoughts get connected through the programmes and activities of the organization.' But Doctor, the real spring of all this lay in you; the work culture you created; your simplicity, your prudence and parsimony, your studiousness, modesty, drive, perseverance and such innumerable attributes have deeply affected the work culture of the organization and shaped its character that refutes orthodox thinking, emphasizes action and encourages sane liberal consciousness. Doctor, we have preserved this consciousness and proved our integrity. No activist possesses the elephant like strength that you did. But in the last two years all of us activists have gathered huge strength.

Many of our workers have earned awards from 5 thousand to 50 thousand rupees during the last two years. Every one of them donated all that they received to the organization with all humility and without any conceit, just as you did when you received ten lakh rupees award in the U.S.A.

The media, both print and electronic have been helping us throughout these two years supporting our demands and telecasting our activities during prime time.

Our organization is progressing under the collective leadership headed by Avinash Patil. Dr. Shailatai, Mukatai and Dr. Hamid have faced the tragedy with great courage and also with restraint. The whole family seems to have merged into the larger family of the organization.

Doctor, just two years back, we all were standing by the side of the funeral supporting each other with tearful eyes; but those tears were not just the tears of grief and helplessness. Those were tears silently reassuring each other not to give up but to keep on fighting for the freedom of thought, freedom to criticize exploitative religious practices, freedom to eradicate atrocious 'Jaat Panchayat' and superstition and freedom to usher in a new era of reason, of scientific temper and of overall human progress.

(Translated by Ms Suman Oak)

vinayak.savale123@gmail.com



## **Harrowing Experience of Kanifnath Fair**

*Prabha Purohit*

This year also as usual there was Kanifnath Fair at Panchmarhi. (Also known just as Madhi.) Worshippers reached the summit with sticks in their hands. They worshipped Kanifnath. But there were no Caste & Community Council (CCC) meetings. No long drawn arguments, no free supply of liquor, no violence, no hitting of the sticks on the floor after each verdict as was customary, but only peace. All because of the fact that villagers have buried the Caste & Community Councils (CCC) and with it its atrocities for good. How come this change of hearts? Here is the background story.

Panchmarhi is a village in Pathardi Taluka of Ahmadnagar District. There rests the tombstone of Saint Kafirnath covered with his temple. On 'Rang Panchami', fifth day after Holi a grand annual fair is held every year. It is a great festive occasion for the villagers and tribal population in the district. Over a lakh villagers attend the fair in large groups. Actually the fair starts from Holi festival and ends on Gudhi Padwa, the first day of the New Year. But the real festivities are on Rang Panchami day.

The fair is essentially for followers of Kafirnath, but all villagers as well as nomadic tribal population participate with enthusiasm. For years CCC are convened here for those who do not own even an inch of land and have no roof over their head and have to move from one corner to the other in search of food to keep their bodies warm. But they assemble here without fail each year to attend their CCC meetings. So strong is the blind faith.

Marriages, divorces, loans, repayments, fights, births, deaths, extra-marital relationships – all these events have to be recorded with their CCC for legitimacy. These CCCs represent forty two castes and hundred more sub-castes and wield unlimited power. Nomadic tribes have four major law courts located in Madhi in Ahmadnagar district, Soneri in Usmanabad, Jejuri in Pune district and Malegaon in Nanded. Among them Madhi CCC is the most powerful, the Supreme Court of roaming nomadic population. Persons of all castes attend the fair and around twenty five to thirty castes convene their CCC. The decisions of these councils are final, declared by hitting the ground with stick and there is no scope for any appeal whatsoever. .

This year was exception to the tradition of hundred years of CCC meetings. The fair was held, attended by large crowds, Kafirnath worshipped but there were no Caste & Community Council meetings! This was a landmark in history of roaming nomadic free community. A first step for getting absorbed in the mainstream of the civil society. It did not happen overnight. The Councils that had a tight grip over day today life of these roaming communities were very powerful institutions. The council members enjoyed lifelong authority that would pass on to their next generation through inheritance. A few of the community did go to schools, secure permanent jobs, but control over their lives still vested with the Council authorities.

Huge fines and inhuman punishments imposed by these Councils caused them to be constantly in public eye. Women had no role to play, and if the Councils were to rule on matters related to even marriages or divorces, women could not appear themselves before the Council. They needed to find male intermediary to represent their case. Punishments that were awarded to persons who were found guilty by the Council were atrocious. Persons were asked to walk barefoot over burning coals, or eat their own excreta, pick a coin from the boiling oil can, tie footwear to one's tongue or shear hair of young women. For atonement of a wrong doing of her parents a girl was asked to marry and live with a man thrice her age. Madhi Council was especially famous (?) for such inhuman abuses. Such punishments were more common with hunter and paramedic caste councils.

Ostracizing family of the person declared guilty by the Council was one more atrocity routinely practiced by these Councils even for minor misdemeanours by individuals. The family would be banished; no one would talk to them, exchange anything or attend to them in birth or death. Such families would prefer death over their awful secluded living.

In case the family wanted to return to society it had to pay enormous fines amounting to lakhs of rupees. How could a family which did not know from where its next bread is coming, or coming or not, arrange to pay such huge sums? The answer was simple. The council office bearers were financially very rich, and they would lend money to the banished families who wanted to come back, the interest charged was anywhere between 10 to 30 percent per month. The whole transaction was oral. The powers of council office bearers were so strong and nomads had such blind trust in them that no one could utter a word in protest. If at all anyone wanted to bring an issue in front of the council, it was essential for both parties to supply liquor and feed meat to the office bearers of the Council on all days when the matter was under consideration. This expense was in addition to the prescribed fees. Transactions like these amounting to crores of rupees took place in Madhi fair totally in contravention of country's law and order, and that too in open daylight.....

The young nomads were not very happy with this situation. Their discomfort would erupt in a sporadic manner. But these were exceptions. The first crack to this fortress of the Caste & Community Councils [occurred when a pregnant woman from Nashik was murdered by her father. Because the girl belonging to nomad Joshi community married a boy outside the caste, the Council ordered her father to kill her

and atone himself. This murder caused shocks and woke up the Government, the Society, the Press and the NGOs.

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar declared that his committee for eradication of superstitions is launching campaign against the malpractices of the Community and Caste Councils. The action started immediately. But Dr. Dabholkar himself was killed.

The death angered his activists but they were not discouraged, instead they continued their fight against superstitions with more vigour in the Ahmad Nagar district. People were made aware of the misdeeds of the Councils and were encouraged to think rationally. To add fuel to the fire there was this Taya Lokhande episode that forced Dr. Dabholkar's team to decide about the fate of Caste & Community Councils

Taya Lokhande was from paramedic nomads of Rahuri and he was sentenced for seven years' imprisonment on the charge of a murder. When he was away his wife divorced him. On his return Taya was forced by the Council to marry a three year old girl child from the family of his first wife. For twelve years this girl stayed with her parents. Taya then laid claim on his new bride. The parents did not want to part with their daughter, so the CCC asked the parents to pay a fine of two lakhs rupees for refusing to send their child to Taya. Parents agreed to pay. Two years ago the parents sought divorce for their daughter from the Council. Then the council allowed the divorce but on a very callous condition that the parents should send their daughter to spend a night with Taya! Then divorce was theirs!!

This time on ANS put its full force to resolve the issue. Initially it was denied any assistance even from Police officials. ANS Secretary of Nagar district, Advocate Ranjana Gawande spent an entire year in follow up with District Police Superintendent and Women and Child Care Department. There were public discussions, enlightenment, interviews on one hand and legal proceedings at various levels on the other. The Press also provided positive support. Nomad Joshi community decided to boycott their Council and there were no meetings of other caste councils in Madhi. Young members from paramedic community were now openly criticizing the Councils. Those who were in receipt of school education now started attending ANS functions and lending the activists their full support.

In the paramedic community Council meeting last year in Madhi, that ghastly condition in Taya Lokhande case was withdrawn and divorce granted to the innocent girl. ANS won its one and half year old battle. Last full year there were no CCC meetings anywhere else. Madhi's meeting where the divorce was granted straight away was the last such meeting. Last Sunday ANS district secretary Adv. Ranjana Gawande met Krushna Chandgude of crusade against Asif Shaikh, and with others council member Chander Babu Daaserjogi of paramedic community, Shaamling Maruti Shinde, Mallu Maruti Shinde, and many other leaders from that community in the Government Rest House in Shrirampur. The stick used to pronounce Councils' decisions by hitting the ground with it was broken into pieces and hundred year old tradition of Council was (lead - change to) laid to rest for ever.

This year too there was Kafirnath fair, worships, touching the ceiling with sticks, but there were no council meets, no liquor, no free meat lunches.

However, it is being maintained that these nomads need an alternative to Caste Council as they cannot afford the current established system of justice. Dr. Balkrishna Renake, Chairman, Central Commission for Roaming Nomads, is of the opinion that these CCC can be restructured positively by districts or regions to provide a platform for nomads to resolve without hassle their family or financial issues. The members to these newly constituted CCC will be elected by community members and not constituted by inheritance. Serious crimes, murders have to be handled by police only. “If we have disputes free villages why can’t we have disputes less nomad communities?” asks Dr. Renake.

One such restructured Council is successfully in operation for Gondhali – Vasudeo – Joshi community run by youths in Nanded. ANS has realized that the fair at Madhi can be used positively to educate nomads on health and personal care, family planning, explaining government aid schemes, providing ration cards and other certificates etc. The work is progressing in that direction. Attempts are also directed towards meeting nomads at their habitats to carry the learning activities.

The Government has announced that it plans to bring in the legislation against CCC by passing necessary acts. ANS has prepared and presented the draft to the Government last Friday. It is hoped that there will not be any delay this time as was the case with anti – magic bill. It is very necessary that these centres of exploitation are brought under central jurisdiction and eliminated permanently to erase hundred years of darkness and bring in rays of enlightenment to roaming nomads.

prabha.purohit@gmail.com

● ● ●

## Herd Mentality in Politics

*Pervez Hoodbhoy*

HUMANS are smart enough to make it to Pluto. But that’s only if we use our brains well. At the instinctual level nature condemns our species to conformity and uniformity. Our brains are hardwired in a way that belief often gets precedence over reason, and conformity over individual judgement. Clever experiments in social psychology and cognitive neuroscience are now confirming this. Amazingly, neuroimaging techniques can even identify parts of the brain responsible for group behaviour.

Our herd instinct developed as lower animals transformed into humans over thousands of centuries. Without it our ancestors could not have banded together to fight off wild animals or help each other harvest crops. Our species still needs cooperation and a strong group instinct — in fact we need it more than ever before. But the downside is that in places where critical thinking is unusual, herds are readily manipulated by political leaders and demagogues.

Pakistan’s political scene reinforces this dismal truth. Just look at the nonchalance of Imran Khan and his followers after the judicial commission issued its report last month. A patient sifting of the evidence

had decisively repudiated their claims of systematic mass rigging in the 2013 elections. But the heroic kaptan and his herd were unapologetic. During their dharna carnival last year, they made Islamabad grind to a halt. Perched on his container, Cricketer Khan, together with the jet-setting cleric, Tahirul Qadri, had demanded fresh elections and promised to make milk and honey flow. They vowed to eliminate corruption but neither had a plan. Their groupies didn't ask for one.

### **Why do people repose blind faith in leaders or ideologies?**

Ditto for the worshipful cult of Bhutto jiyalas who flatly deny any wrongdoing by father Zulfikar, daughter Benazir or husband Zardari. As that clan sees it, no evidence is evidence if it makes the Bhuttos come out looking bad. Jiyalas won't read the Hamoodur Rahman report on Zulfikar's role in East Pakistan, they'll avoid studying the evidence of corruption that led to a guilty verdict by a Swiss court for the Bonnie-Clyde duo, and refuse to see the copiously documented big-money transactions from their offshore accounts. Their ownership of the magnificent Surrey Palace and other properties doesn't matter. Instead, airports and roads bear the lady's name today.

As for brother Altaf, the less said the better. He is, of course, immensely entertaining and his renditions of old Hindi film songs are hilarious. For sound and fury, his rants are incomparable. Although there are good chances that he will deny tomorrow what he says today, to the faithful this makes no difference. Wall-sized pictures of their great leader adorn MQM meetings. All charges of money laundering, extortion, kidnapping, torture, or murder are vociferously denied. Please don't bother with the evidence, they say, because we will never believe any.

Of course, the world has seen much worse: Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, and others. But why do people repose blind faith in leaders or ideologies? How is it that otherwise sane and sensible people become moronically incapable of grasping reality? The culprit: our brain. Still evolving and still primitive, it readily sacrifices rational evidence-based conclusions in favour of primal ones. And so conformism trumps individual judgement. But now scientists are inventing ever sharper probes in the hope that one day we might transcend these limitations.

In 1951, the devastating impact of conformism upon human judgement was investigated in a simple but brilliant experiment. Social psychologist Solomon Asch organised volunteers who were asked to judge a line's length by comparing it against three sample lines. The real answer was clear as day. Left to themselves, the volunteers got the correct answer 100 per cent of the time. But Asch had secretly planted in the group a majority of goons who had been instructed to mislead by choosing the wrong answer. The goons disoriented the volunteers. The result: 74pc conformed with the wrong answer at least once, and 32pc did so all the time. The herd triumphed over the individual.

More recently, Prof Jens Krause of Leeds University showed that humans follow classic animal grouping behaviour. His team performed a series of experiments where volunteers were told to randomly walk around a large hall without talking to each other. A select few were then given more detailed instructions on where to walk. The scientists discovered that, like sheep following the flock, people end up blindly following one or two people who appear to know where they're going. Many were



unaware that they were following someone. The published results showed that it only takes 5pc of 'informed individuals' to influence the direction of a crowd of around 200 people. The remaining 95pc follow without even realising it.

When people are like sheep, a democratic system cannot function well. But it doesn't stop there. The frequently unscientific behaviour of Pakistan's scientists owes directly to their tragic inability to think independently. Example: after the famed nuclear bomb-makers Dr A.Q. Khan and Dr Samar Mubarakmand endorsed the so-called water car, hundreds of Pakistani scientists joined in the chorus praising this fake invention. They followed their leaders, ignoring common sense. But, to their lasting embarrassment, the episode turned out to be fraudulently staged and the inventor was a failed bank robber.

It is not easy to resist group conformity anywhere in the world. Our desire to somehow fit in moulds attitudes. We value social acceptance, seek assimilation, and fear rejection of our views. In fact the smaller a minority, the more it hesitates to express a contrary opinion. In repressive societies the penalties for not conforming can be severe, even death.

Men go mad in herds but recover their sanity one by one. Weak individuals never mend but strong ones can. At some point you may choose to trust your own eyes and refuse to follow the crowd. This is precisely what makes human progress happen. If you are open to hearing facts and arguments that violate your current beliefs, and if evidence can make you change those beliefs, then you too can walk the new walk.

*The writer teaches physics in Lahore and Islamabad.*

Courtesy: Dawn, August 8th, 2015

hoodbhoy@lms.mit.edu

● ● ●

## Death of an Author

*Vishram Gupte*

All humans are mortal. An author, being human is mortal too. This old Socratic logic comes to one's mind because the present literary discourse is replete with the issue 'Death of an Author'. We have already seen how the three extra-literary forces -media, market and money- affect the literature of the day. Now we will look at the interrelation between the threat of death issued to a author and his creative writing.

On 7th of January 2015, the Tamil novelist, Perumal Murugan declared his own death as a author. Henceforth, he proclaimed on the social networking site, he will live only as a teacher and not as an

author. The news went viral and the then unknown Murugan came into the lime light. The reason? His novel, as the town people complained brought shame on them. Murugan readily apologised to them.

In the changed political atmosphere of the day, fortune has smiled on the self styled stalwarts defending and safeguarding 'our culture'. This has jeopardized author's freedom of expression. The Murugan episode has intensified their anxiety. Whenever uninhibited criticism of mythological, religious, historical and political traditions is brought to a standstill, society stagnates. On the other hand, free criticism, as western countries have shown, lets civil life flow like a spring. There, dissenting books are not banned every now and then; nor are injunctions issued and authors killed for their noncompliant rebellious thoughts. Not that there are fewer orthodox traditionalists in Europe and America; but the value of 'freedom of expression' is ingrained in their minds.

Murugan's apology sounds quite theatrical as a prerequisite for media coverage. His stand in rendering his apology is exaggerated as in a Tamil film. He says, he will refrain from any writing hereafter and burn all his books written earlier. This is certainly not becoming of an author to be silenced on being intimidated by his antagonists. It is difficult to determine whether Murugan is trying to create a sympathy wave or exposing his opponents by apologising. Here one has to recognise and accept the importance of the all-pervading print and electronic media in our lives. They influence both the diehard cultural chauvinists giving vent to their anger and the Murugans surrendering to them. It will be interesting to see whether people really burn Murugan's books or whether they achieve record sales. His death publicized through media may even resuscitate him with a new life as an author. A fascinating paradox by the media!

Authors like Murugan advertising their own death through media live with a new vigour while vigorous authors like Tarun Tejpal, the previous editor of 'Tehelka' who wrote the agitating novel 'The Alchemy of Desire' are destroyed by the media. With his secular-liberal outlook, Tejpal constantly opposed the rightists' point of view. The ambitious Indian English author loved life. However when he was accused of having committed a sexual assault his primordial human character burst out impairing the author in him. Everything he did in his defence bounced back and the same media that made him larger than life, ruined him.

Murugan on the other hand has survived after announcing his own death while Tarun Tejpal, the fighter, is lying on his death bed as an author. If something scandalous is eventually revealed in the Sunanda Murder case, Shashi Tharur, the post-modern author of, 'The Great Indian Novel' too will be persecuted to his death as an author like Tarun Tejpal. Both Tharur and Tejpal are powerful orators; both of them moved about in the media triumphantly. Today they appear defeated. Media being neutral cares little for the author; what it is interested in is News and brings unknown authors into limelight and throws the well-known and popular ones into gloom.

Murugan's proclamation of his own death and the religious injunction issued by the Iranian president Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 to kill Salman Rushdie are not the same. Murugan's proclamation is a metaphorical suicide while Khomeini's injunction was to authorise Rushdie's murder. Poor Rushdie had

to spend ten precious years of his life, hiding like a rat in its hole and nearly 60 people with no connection with his controversial book had to pay with their lives. This is a first ever instance where so many human beings had to sacrifice their lives to uphold an individual's right to freedom of expression. A much smaller number of individuals were shot dead for the 'Charley Hebdo' publication.

Throughout the period of injunction, the British Government provided Salman Rushdie a 24 hours Z+ security. Many British people questioned the propriety of bearing the expenses for Rushdie's security by the British Government. They objected to society being obliged to pay for the ideas and thoughts of a maverick. In his book-'Joseph Anton' relating his memories of injunction period, Rushdie narrates how the injunction to kill him affected the politics of the world. Only because of the 'ten years 24 hours' security provided by the British Government, Rushdie is alive today. Thus the British Government have virtually bought 'Freedom of Expression' of the author by spending lakhs of pounds for it.

More frightening than Murugan's metaphorical suicide or the injunction to murder Rushdie is the killing of Safder Hashmi, the Indian author, by his opponents. Hashmi, a Marxist, wrote Street Plays. On 1st Jan 1989, during a street play in a town near Delhi, opponents of the Congress made an armed attack on them. Safdar Hashmi was killed. Rambahadur, a worker was also killed. But no one took notice of it. A question then arose whether an author's life is more valuable than that of a common man. Even after so many years the bitter resentment seen in this question has not reduced.

Earlier those who opposed freedom of expression did so symbolically. In the 1980 decade Kartarsingh Thatte infuriated by Tendulkar's play went to his house and beat him with a cane. The religious fundamentalist surrounded Tendulkar; yet Tendulkar did not declare his own death unlike Murugan. On the contrary, in another such incident, he came out with a gun and threatened to shoot at his challengers.

Compared with the way traditional society oppresses freedom of expression today, Kartarsingh's symbolical caning of the playwright Tendulkar seems quite mild and preferable. In a vastly communicative society a huge network of media emerges. Everybody and every group is able to express their own opinion freely. Resulting in a great commotion of arguments and counter arguments. However these are not the people whom Dr Amartya Sen portrays in his book, 'The Argumentative Indian'. They are those ultra cultural chauvinists who insist that what they say or believe is right and all others are wrong.

This cultural terrorism out to kill enlightened and forward-looking authors is surely not a recent trend. It is entrenched in the traditionalist Indian mind since several centuries. In India, proud of its ancient Indian religion and religious traditions critical thinking is almost frozen. Here superstition, credulous devotion, pressure of family traditions, belief in the book or the word are rooted in people's mind so deeply that it is simply impossible to criticize them. To add to this peril, many Indian writers choose to romanticize traditions that hinder progress, instead of criticizing them. Many authors write to enthrall the crowd and those who refuse to do so have to face threats to their lives or get caned. Some have to declare their own death. Authors like Safder Hashmi have to die.

In the Indian hierarchical society the freedom to live as a human being is denied to a large section of the population. Where the basic Human Rights are denied to the Dalits, the original inhabitants and the nomadic tribes, how much importance can be given to the right of free expression of an author? Activists like to ask this question. The reply is: education is most important for nomadic tribes; so is freedom of expression for the authors. For, both these are constituents of the human society and preserving the dignity of both is the responsibility and obligation of the culture. Furthermore nobody is immortal. Every human being is mortal and the author too being human is mortal.

(Translated by Ms Suman Oak)

● ● ●

## Real Tribute to Jawaharlal Nehru

*Kumar Ketkar*

Seventy-five years from now, in 2089/90, there will be 200th birth anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru. Nobody in this hall, despite my best wishes, would be present on that occasion. But indeed, would the Indians at that time organize the 200th anniversary of Pandit Nehru? Even now birth and death anniversaries of great people have become mere formalities, often orchestrated as "events" without content or "homage" without purpose.

As for the 200th birth anniversary is concerned, are we even sure that this century is not the last century of the civilization? The world's great scientists like Martin Rees and even Stephen Hawking have seriously raised this question in the context of climate change, politics of hate and techno-terrorism. Pandit Nehru, in his time warned almost a decade in advance that the world is heading for a global war. The Second World War confirmed his apprehension. But in those days, there were Gandhiji, Nehru and Tagore. Who is guiding the destiny of the world today? Ironically, not any political leader, but the Pope is raising these concerns all over the world!

In the year 1940, when actually Hitler was winning in the first phase of war, Charlie Chaplin made a film titled "The Great Dictator". I urge you all to see it, if you have not seen it already. It is easily accessible on the net or YouTube. Each time I see the film these days I remember Narendra Modi, when Chaplin caricatures Hitler. Chaplin proved to be prophetic and courageous. Five years after the film was released, the Nazis were defeated and Hitler committed suicide. That was Chaplin's politics.

Nehru too saw the possibility of fascism spreading its poisonous network immediately after independence. In a letter dated 7th December 1947, that is just about four months after his historic speech of Tryst with Destiny, he wrote to the chief ministers, " we have a great deal of evidence to show that the RSS is an organization...and is definitely proceeding on the strictest Nazi lines, even following the technique of organization...it is not our desire to interfere with civil liberties...but their activities more and more go beyond the limits and it is desirable to keep a watchful eye and to take such actions as they may deem necessary...I have some knowledge of the way the Nazi movement developed in Germany. It attracted by its superficial trappings and strict discipline, considerable

numbers of young men for whom life appeared to offer little to attract them. And so they drifted towards the Nazi party because its policies and programmes, appeared simple, negative and did not require an active effort of the mind. The Nazi party brought Germany to ruin and I have little doubt that if these tendencies are allowed to spread and increase in India, they would do enormous injury to India. No doubt India would survive, but would be grievously wounded and would take a long time to recover. His worst fears have come true with RSS Pracharak becoming prime minister of the country. Unless we reverse this dangerous fall into abyss, it would be too late for the country to recover. What Chaplin warned through his film, *The Great Dictator*, Nehru alerted us 68 years ago. But did we heed to their warnings? Did we make people aware of the fascist spectre haunting India?

Charlie Chaplin and Jawaharlal Nehru shared a lot, not just the year of their birth, (Chaplin April 16 and Jawaharlal November 14, 1889 ) though they may not have actually lived together. Their attitudes and world view, their political and cultural outlook, their ideological leanings and political beliefs were shaped by the period they lived in. Born 25 years before the First World War, they saw the degradation and exploitation of the poor and working class in England, they saw the helplessness of the marginalized and also saw the greed and arrogance of the rich and the capitalists, they saw the silent suffering of the hapless women and men and despite such frustrating existence, they saw hope and life force among those people.

The Kid, which struggles to survive odds of poverty and a kind of orphan hood, the poor blind girl in the City Lights who loves and dreams better life, the mindless greed in the Gold Rush and the little tramp's pathetic and pleasant fight to overcome misery or the emerging corporate capitalism and the workers' alienation in the Modern Times. The eloquence and the message of those silent films were louder and clearer than all the hi-tech-hi-decibel-multi-speaker Dolby sound systems.

Though Jawaharlal was in England only from 1905 to 1912, for seven years, and that too in the elitist atmosphere of Harrow and Cambridge, he was sensitive to the life beyond those hallowed institutions. That period in England was of intense dialogue and debate which influenced sensitive young minds. From the vantage point in England, it was possible to learn about the upheavals in world. The victory of Japan in 1905 over the Czarist Russia was one such major event. An Asian country had defeated the imperial European nation. Nehru was greatly influenced by this development. In India too there was the rising nationalist awareness, symbolized by Lokmanya Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghose. They had begun to make waves in the Indian community in England. The trigger was of course the partition of Bengal. In the same time spa the Irish Home Rule Movement was challenging the aggressive English imperialism. For the English Ruling class, the Indian, the Irish and even the workers in British factories were same, fodder for their profits. Jawaharlal was trying to establish the link in all these apparently separate but connected events.

It was at that point of time, the idea of socialism hit him as intellectual and compassionate interpretation of the otherwise complex human predicament. The leading academicians and thinkers and the debaters in Cambridge, were influenced by the same idea. Actually, very little of Karl Marx works were in the

public domain then. Volumes of Das Capital came in English language after 1897. Indeed, Marx had died in 1883, just six years before Jawaharlal was born. It was left to Fredrick Engels to see the publication of the works of Marx in other languages. Though the idea of socialism was emerging as a major polemical discourse, hardly anyone had gone through the whole works of Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels. There were several parallel theories of socialism even before Marxism established its intellectual and ideological hegemony. Nehru was influenced by the humanism and idealism in those theories. That was prior to the Russian Revolution. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia under the leadership of Lenin in 1917, really opened the ideological floodgates.

But Nehru had gone to England at the age 16 in 1905 and returned in 1912, when he was 23, that is five years before that Revolution and just two years before the Great War. That was the Age of Uncertainty in the life of Jawaharlal, to re-contextualize the expression of John Kenneth Galbraith. When Jawaharlal came back to India, Lokmanya Tilak was in Mandalay jail, serving the term on the charges of sedition. The moderates under Gopal Krishna Gokhale had not been able to take the mantle of the Congress. Neither leadership, nor programme - the Congress was stagnating organizationally and politically. Gokhale had gone to South Africa to urge Gandhiji to come to India to lead the movement. But Gandhiji came only in 1915, the same year Gokhale passed away.

Nehru was not sure as to what he should exactly do. The only thing certain in that period of uncertainty was he had decided to join the freedom movement and not pursue career. Though his father, Motilal, was politically with the moderates, he was a rebel in personal and social life. He would not succumb to the pressures of the ritualistic conservatives in the family. Somehow this personal militancy was compatible with his moderate politics! Jawaharlal refused to be politically moderate, but was impressed by the father's rebellious approach.

During his England days, Jawaharlal was also influenced by the scientific and philosophical revolution that was taking place in Europe. Einstein's special theory of relativity had stunned and enthralled the world in 1905. Bertrand Russell and A N Whitehead's Principia Mathematica had charged and inspired the academic world. The flying machines created by Wright Brothers in America, were opening new horizons. It was only natural that Nehru would be inquisitive and would engage his mind in learning more and more about science. The world of science and ideologies was unfolding in front of him. No other leader in the world has incorporated the notion of scientific temper in the very idea of freedom. Without scientific temper, there would be no inquiry into the nature of things. Without inquiry, there would be no scientific progress. Without progress, it will not be possible to fight and eliminate poverty and injustice. To achieve that people must be free and be able to decide for themselves. For him the ideas of freedom and peace, ethics and economics, culture and civilization were one integrated weltanschauung.

The international mobilization of trade unionists between 1912-14, had created new awareness, that indeed the workers of the world must unite to fight the global capitalist class. The Fabian movement which brought under its fold even George Bernard Shaw, was seen as an alternative to conservatives in

England. Shaw's plays which had not really been successful initially, began to pick up in the first two decades of the twentieth century. No wonder, Nehru could develop literary and political relationship with Shaw. Not many people know or don't care that Shaw had addressed a labour meeting with Lokmanya Tilak on stage, when he had gone to London in 1919, for a court case. Shaw had declared his total support to the freedom movement in India in that meeting. So the atmosphere was charged with ideas and ideologies. Nehru easily immersed himself into that. He later became president of the All India Trade Union Congress.

Unless we take into account, this mood of the first two decades of the twentieth century, we would not be able to understand Nehru and his world view, his politics and his philosophy of life. As the superficial stability and calm began to evaporate in the second decade of the twentieth century, Nehru began to formulate on the ideas of freedom and peace, social justice and the causes of the misery in the world. The Great War and the Russian Revolution were the triggers, that set him thinking on these issues. Nehru was continuously evolving, growing and creatively trying to understand the world. He wanted to change it, and so he must understand it in all its splendour. That is why, the teenager Jawaharlal in Harrow, young " Fabian " debater in Cambridge, angry and uncomfortable young man when he returned to India, a kind of Marxist-Leninist in the twenties, Dedicated Gandhian in the freedom movement and that too without giving up his socialist ideals, courageous fighter against the British Raj, negotiator in most difficult times of partition and freedom, prime minister and global statesman, mentor to many African countries liberation movements, founder of non-aligned movement--are various stages on the trajectory of growth in his personality, his thinking and action.

His understanding of the symbiotic relationship between Freedom and Peace as expressed in the *Discovery of India*, is a profound reflection on the history of mankind as well as direct response to the troubled decades of war and devastation in the First and Second World War. Actually, the *Discovery* was written a couple of years before the war was over and Nazis vanquished. This means that he had not only seen the mindless World War One but also the formation and failure of the League of Nations, whose aim was to avoid wars and establish peace. Within a decade of the collapse of the League of Nations, the Nazis established their Reich in Germany and did not hide their plans of aggressive expansionism. The ominous rise of Hitler and spread of his tentacles, the concentration camps and extension of terror across Europe, the discontents of civilization exploding in the same region which was known for Renaissance and militarized Japan expanding its territories--all this in just a matter of three decades, were his direct encounters with his times. All that became history much later. For him it was living through such volcanic eruptions, though he was in jail contemplating about past and future. Two years after his release from the jail, came independence but with partition and holocaust. The whole Indian subcontinent was in turmoil. The world had become even more insecure despite the victory of the allies and defeat of the Nazis. The American bombing of Hiroshima-Nagasaki in August 1945 had brought world to the nuclear precipice. Four years later Communist Russia conducted its own atomic tests. Now in the real sense the Cold War began and with it nuclear brinkmanship. From Korea to Cuba and from Palestine to Vietnam, there were tensions everywhere and each with nuclear

dimension. Again in almost each global crisis, from Suez to African region it was Nehru's intervention which proved to be crucial. It may sound hyperbolic, but without Nehru, the world could have faced yet another world war. But are we as Indians, as liberals, as internationalists, even grateful to him? What efforts have we made to take his ideas and ideals to the people? We have remembered him on birth and death anniversaries and forgotten that we are a democratic, secular, liberal country today, thanks mainly to him. Most countries which became free after the Second World War, ended up in military dictatorships and civil wars. Let us not take India for granted. India too is on the brink of anarchy and multiple civil strife, which can degenerate into civil war like situations.

When India became free there was hope and people rejoiced in Africa and most of Asia. Jawaharlal Nehru was like a Deepstambha in the turbulent history. Almost whole of Africa was in colonial chains. Most of Asia was under colonial yoke but was awakening to the idea of freedom. The Latin American countries had begun to assert for themselves. But the colonial masters in Europe who talked of Liberty and Equality, Democracy and Plato's Republic were not ready to give up their imperial hold. The Jewel in the Crown, India, the largest colony of the British Empire was subjected to humiliation, subservience and denial of all freedoms and basic rights. Unless the people in all these continents were free, there would be no peace. Nehru thought that this realization would dawn on the so called civilized nations. But that did not. The struggle then became inevitable.

The End of History is nowhere in sight though. In fact, we are witnessing the repeat of history, but not as a farce, but yet another tragedy. The neo-imperialist and neo-colonial corporate-capitalist control of the world, the soulless march of the market forces, the superpower hegemony with global policing and half of the world population still half starved shows that Nehru's dream is yet to be fulfilled. Most of the African and Asian countries were liberated after India became independent and Jawaharlal Nehru was the iconic leader of those people.

Yet, when the India-Africa summit was held in Delhi a couple of weeks ago, the current Indian leadership thought of not even mentioning Nehru's name, forget his legacy. It was left to some African heads of states to recall the glorious Nehruvian ethos. That is the depth of hatred of Nehru. The present Prime Minister is globetrotting today as if there was no world before he became India's Furer. He and the RSS want to wipe out from history, not only Nehru's name, but the whole freedom movement. They will not succeed in their bizarre effort, because Nehru's footprints are all over India and the world. But let us also not forget that these dangerously regressive forces have come to power by using the democratic institutions built by the Independence Movement and Pandit Nehru's direct personal contribution.

However, there are signs that realization, though belated, is coming. With a little far fetched analogy, I can say that the elections in Bihar will prove to be Stalingrad to the neo-Nazis who have usurped power in India. It was in Stalingrad, that the Nazi aggression was turned back by the Red Army. But for the valour shown by the Russian people in Stalingrad, the history would have been different. If indeed Hitler had defeated the Russian army, it would have been Not only Fortress Europe, but the whole world



would have come under the Nazi boot. In next two days the results of Bihar elections will be out. If the NDA-led by the current Prime Minister fails to win Bihar, his saffron fascist forces will be checked. But that does not mean the war will have been won. It took nearly three years even after the Nazis were humiliated in Russia. The price paid by Russia for the world to be free and democratic was huge. Over 30 million Russian people sacrificed their lives so that Nazi evil is destroyed.

We must not remain complacent. Indeed because of our collective complacency, political irresponsibility of all liberal and progressive parties and ideological neglect of Nehruvian legacy, we are in the present predicament. I am not sure whether we have really understood Nehru's politics, his philosophy and his global perspective. That is what we should preserve and promote so that the people all over the world are able to live in freedom and in peace. That would be the real tribute to Jawaharlal Nehru on his 125th birth anniversary.

*(The transcript of the keynote address delivered by the author in the conference inaugurated by Dr Manmohan Singh. Irfan Habib was another key note speaker.)*

[ketkar.kumar@gmail.com](mailto:ketkar.kumar@gmail.com)

• • •

## Be an Enlightened Hindu

*Keshav Shet*

Long time ago I came to the conclusion that there is really no point in writing an article or a book if the reader could get the same information from other sources. So my work must be original in content. In this series of articles, I will share with our family members the story of Hinduism, which they have never heard or read before, so that they could become enlightened Hindus.

Without exception the right wing Hindu goons who are fomenting hatred for non-Hindus in India today under communal-minded BJP rule are almost totally ignorant of what Hinduism is. What is the proof? Well, their hateful behavior is a clue par excellence to their monumental ignorance. In fact, most so-called Swamis and Gurus of Hinduism have no clue about the fundamental tenets of Hinduism. What little they know they gained from their ignorant Gurus who in turn were indoctrinated by their ignorant Gurus. Mostly they are into making money by means of mindless rituals. Such is the sad state of affairs with today's Hinduism.

Around 1030 A.D., a great Islamic scholar, scientist, astronomer, author and philosopher by the name of Al Biruni came to India as part of Ghazni Mohamed's raiding army. He was more or less Mohamed's prisoner. He learned Sanskrit and thoroughly studied most of the available Sanskrit texts and sacred books. Being a great lover of India he authored a wonderful book by the title of Kitabu'l Hind. Every proud Hindu must read this book. Though he loved India and Hindus a great deal, his scientific temperament and objectivity did not prevent him from noticing behavior of Hindus a thousand years ago:

“In the fifth place, there are other causes, the meaning of which sounds like a satire – peculiarities of their national character, deeply rooted in them, but manifest to everybody. We can only say, folly is an illness for which there is no medicine, and the Hindus believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no religion like theirs, and no science like theirs. They are haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited, and stolid. They are by nature niggardly in communicating that which they know, and they take the greatest possible care to withhold it from men of another caste among their own people, still much more, of course, from any foreigner. According to their belief, there is no other country on earth but theirs, no other race of man but theirs, and no created beings besides them have any knowledge of science whatsoever. Their haughtiness is such that, if you tell them of any science or scholar in Khorasan and Persis, they will think you to be both an ignoramus and a liar. If they travelled and mixed with other nations, they would soon change their mind, for their ancestors were not as narrow-minded as the present generation is. Now such is the state of things in India.”

Seems like for one thousand years time has stood still in India!!!!

### **The Sacred Books**

There is a saying, which goes as follows: Before you begin to do anything, there is always something else you need to do first. So, before I begin this series, I would like to discuss a few issues with the reader:

- The Sacred books: Hinduism is based on three sacred books: The Vedas, the Vedānta (the end part of the Vedic knowledge, which contains the essence of the Upanishads) and the Bhagavad Gita.
- Many authors: Hindu religious leaders have promoted the myth that one author (Vyāsa) created all these sacred books, and they were “written” over 5,000 years ago. The truth is innumerable authors, often opposing each other’s views, composed these sacred books several centuries apart between 2000 B.C. and 100 B.C.
- Contradictions: This explains why in these texts one often finds one sentence or paragraph promoting one doctrine, and the very next sentence or paragraph contradicting that very doctrine. Not knowing the fact that over the centuries these texts were the battleground on which opposing factions fought each other for supremacy, even eminent scholars, such as Max Mueller - not to mention the great Shankarāchārya himself- were baffled by the glaring contradictions in the texts.
- Indirect communication: Very often religious, social and political circumstances forced ancient authors to communicate indirectly or deviously with their audience for fear of reprisal by authorities of these entities, or for not wanting to offend their adversaries too much. This was especially the case with the later scriptures such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. These indirect means they used consisted of metaphors, double entendre, secret codes, Sūtra, enigmatic parables, and the like. To make sense of these, one must know their historical context. Here is an example of a metaphoric story that appears in several Upanishads: *Two birds inseparable friends are sitting on a tree. One bird eats sweet fruits and the other watches not eating. On the same tree*

*man overwhelmed by helplessness and bewilderment grieves. But when he sees the other worshipful Lord and His glory, his grief passes away.*

- Knowledge of history is essential: To make sense of this or any metaphor, one must know what was happening in ancient India when it was composed and what each of these objects -birds, sweet fruit, tree, man, the other Lord- represented when the poet composed it. One must also know the answer for the following questions:
  1. What was it that the man on the tree felt overwhelmingly helplessness about?
  2. What bewildered him?
  3. What was the loss he was grieving over? 4. Who was the Lord upon seeing whom his grief passed away?

Not knowing the answer for any of the above questions, Shankarāchārya (788-820 A.D.) and many other Acharyas wrote mind-boggling and nonsensical commentaries giving full liberty to their fanciful imagination.

- Manipulation: To complicate matters further, over the centuries a lot of mistakes (“typos” in modern lingo) crept into the copies of the texts due to utter carelessness of scribes leading to different meanings and outcomes. Besides, to buttress certain new ideologies in the later scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita, they incongruously inserted materials into much earlier scriptures such as the Upanishads and the Vedas.
- The bottom line is that Hinduism, as it is practiced today, is based on commentaries of various religious leaders who did not know the historical context of its highly corrupted sacred books. Our job is to reveal through methodical detective work their true intent and spirit.

### **History of Hinduism is hidden in the Sacred Books**

Our eyes cannot see what our mind does not know. That is why detectives with “trained eyes” (who know what to look for), see clues where others don’t while investigating a crime scene.

**Eye of Knowledge:** The history of ancient India as well as Hinduism beginning with migration of Ārya people from Central Asia around 2000 B.C. till 100 B.C. is hidden in Hinduism’s three sacred books. One endowed with “the eye of knowledge” –Jnānachakshusā as Lord Krishna put it in the Bhagavad Gita 13:34- could “see” that history hidden in cryptic metaphors and verses throughout these sacred books.

**Encrypted information:** Ancient sages had amazing capacity to convey a large amount of information in very few words, as metaphors or Sūtras (aphorisms). Ancient people caught on to the messages hidden in them without much difficulty. However, none of the commentators of these sacred books knew the history of ancient India, and so none was ever able to decipher them. The result is that you will read a lot of cooked-up nonsense in their commentaries.

Before we reveal the hidden history of Hinduism in the metaphor of two birds on a tree, we need to know a little bit about Sanātana Dharma.

**Sanātana (Ancient) Dharma:** Between 1500 and 1000 B.C. the supreme deity of Sanātana Dharma was Brahma the Creator also known as Prajāpati (lord of beings) and Prakriti. Loyalists of this Dharma believed that Brahma created Nature gods (Indra, Agni, Vayu, Varuna, etc.) in heaven as well as people here on earth. Brahma controlled these gods as well as people by means of three ropes, Gunas of Prakriti –Sattva, Rajas and Tamas (GuNa means rope). All Karma (Action) came from the Gunas of Prakriti.

**Yajna Chakra (Wheel of Yajna):** Brahma set up the quid pro quo system known as Yajna Chakra by means of which the gods gave people natural bounties such as rains, and people thanked them with Yajna. (BG: 3:10-12). There was no selfish motive in these Yajnas.

**Bhagavat Gita:** 3:10-12, 14-15: Having created mankind in the beginning together with Yajna, Prajapati said, “By this you shall propagate; this shall be the milch cow of your desires. Cherish the Devas with this, and may the Devas cherish you in return. Thus cherishing each other you shall reap the supreme good. Cherished by Yajna the Devas shall bestow on you the enjoyment you desire. From food beings become; from rain food produced; from Yajna rain proceeds; Yajna is born of Karma (action arising from the Gunas), and Karma arose from Brahma.

Ancients called this Veda-based Dharma as Brahmavāda.

### Hidden in the Sacred Books

Let us now reveal a part of Hinduism’s ancient history hidden in the 34 Sanskrit-words-long metaphoric stories:

**Mundaka Upanishad:** 3:1:1-2: Two birds inseparable friends are sitting on a tree. One bird eats sweet fruits and the other watches not eating. On the same tree man overwhelmed by helplessness and bewilderment grieves. But when he sees the other worshipful Lord and His glory, his grief passes away.

**Decay of Sanātana Dharma:** Gradually a section of the upper two classes (Brahmins and Kshatriya royals) began to abuse these Yajnas to gain Karmaphalam for themselves: Brahmins convinced Kings that they could earn good Karmaphalam (Punyam) to enjoy in their next life as per the Law of Karma, and in return officiating priests earned hefty Dakshina to enjoy in this life. They declared these selfish Yajnas as Sukrita (good deeds) as they allegedly earned kings Punyam (good Karmaphalam, sweet fruits). Soon animal sacrifice including horses and cows began in order to earn more Punyam for kings and more Dakshina for priests. This is how the noble Sanātana Dharma became decadent Brāhmanism. The tree in this metaphor represented the decadent Brāhmanism. The bird eating sweet fruits represented the group, which indulged in selfish Yajnas desiring good fruits of deeds.

**People grieved over loss of innocence:** By 900 B.C. a large number of people became bewildered by the state of affairs, felt totally helpless to do anything, and grieved over the loss of innocence of the

once-noble Sanātana Dharma. The grieving man sitting on that tree represented these aggrieved people.

**Abandonment:** Disgusted by the fraud and violence in Brāhmanism, many people abandoned it, and started a non-violent Nāstik Dharma, which four centuries later became Jainism under the leadership of Mahāvīra. They made Truth (Satya) and Nonviolence (Ahimsa) as their creed to counter Asatya (falsehood) and Himsa (Violence) of decadent Brāhmanism. 2800 years later Mahatma Gandhi based the nonviolent Satyāgraha on these two Jain principles in his struggle to gain independence for India from the British.

**Rebellion within:** Around 800 B.C., as more people began to abandon Brāhmanism, a group of Kshatriya intellectuals within the fold of Brāhmanism (“inseparable friends”) finally decided to do something: Reform Brāhmanism from within, and if that was not possible, overthrow it and replace it with Upanishadism, which they believed represented the true spirit of Sanātana Dharma. They condemned all Yajnas as well as Karmaphalam as evil. The bird not eating fruits represented these Upanishadic rebels within the fold of Brāhmanism who rejected all fruits of deeds.

**Worshipful Super God:** Upanishadists created a Super God known as Brahman the Supreme and appointed it over Brahma and all Nature gods (Indra, Agni, etc.) of Brāhmanism. They declared Brahma (Prakriti) as Asat (False) as it was destructible, and Brahman as Sat (Real) as It was indestructible and immortal. “The other worshipful Lord” upon seeing whose glory man’s grief passes away represented immortal Brahman the Supreme.

**Revolution:** Puritanical Upanishadists appointed themselves as protectors of the Sanātana Dharma. They condemned all Yajna as evil and replaced it with Yoga of renunciation, the goal of which was to gain knowledge of Brahman and end of Samsāra as per the Law of Karma. They condemned selfish Brahmins as conceited fools and liars, and told them to become selfless Yogis. They invited all disaffected and aggrieved people to join Upanishadism, which promised them freedom from helplessness, delusion and grief caused by Brāhmanism.

**Commentaries:** I will not waste the precious space by quoting longwinded and utterly nonsensical commentaries on this metaphor by various Acharyas who did not know the ancient history of Hinduism. Unfortunately, Hinduism is based on these absurd commentaries!

To be continued....

[keshavashet@yahoo.com](mailto:keshavashet@yahoo.com)



## Holy Cow-Beef and Indian Political Games

*Ram Puniyani*

Can the dietary practices, the animal which is worshipped as a mother by section of population, be brought in on the political arena? While all this sounds surreal, it's true as far as the role of cow is there in Indian political firmament. Recently Maharashtra Government got the Presidents assent to the bill "Maharashtra Animal Preservation (Amendment) Bill 1995 which will now ban the slaughter of bulls and bullocks as well. The defaulters will face a prison term of five years and a fine of Rs. 10000. When I first read 'Animal Preservation' part of the title of the bill, I thought this is some bill related to all the animals which are used for human consumption or deals with the use of animals for different purposes by the society. Contrary to that it turned out that this applies only to Cow and its progeny. A decade ago I was shocked to read that one of the outstanding scholars of ancient Indian History Professor Dwijendra Nath Jha received regular threats on phone telling him not to publish his book, 'Holy Cow Beef in Indian Dietary tradition'. This scholarly work traces the place of beef in Indian diet from centuries.

The idea is to target the minorities for beef eating, and cow slaughter. One recalls that one of the slogans which rent the air in the run up the 2014 General elections was *"Modi ko matdan, gai ko jeevadan (Vote for Modi, give life to the cow), BJP ka sandesh, bachegi gai, bachega desh (BJP's message, the cow will be saved, the country will be saved)"*. This slogan was propped up 'Cow Development Cell' of BJP.

As such emotive-identity issues are the hall mark of the politics in the name of religion. BJP built itself up on another identity issue, that of Ram Temple. The cow has always been accompanying and a parallel issue for political mobilization by RSS-BJP. It has also been the point of triggering violence in many cases all through. With the formation of VHP by RSS in 1964, cow issue has been systematically propped up time and over again. Many a misconceptions about cow, beef eating have been constructed. Building of misconceptions has also been extended to the dietary habits of the 'Muslim' community in particular. The profession of section of Muslims, Kasai (butcher), those in the trade of beef selling has been brought in to the 'Hate other', 'social common sense' in particular. The result being that it is perceived at broad layers of society as if beef eating is compulsory for Muslims. The notion which has been popularized is that Cow is Holy for Hindus: Muslims kill her! The perception is that the Muslim invaders brought beef eating into India. These misconceptions are by now the part of 'social common sense' of the large number of people in the society.

All the components of this are myths and stereotypes have been constructed over a period of time. Time and over again one hears about some small communal violence, killing of dalits and traders of cows leading to communal polarization. Many a dalits dealing with cow hide have been killed in places like Gohana in Hariyana and the VHP leaders had justified such acts.

Contrary to this the beef eating and sacrifice of cows was prevalent here from Vedic period. The sacrifice of cows in the Yagnas (ritual around fire) is extensively mentioned in the scriptures. There is mention about beef eating in various books. There is a phrase in Taitreya Brahmin which states 'Atho Annam Via Gau' (Cow is in veritably food) Different gods are mentioned to be having their choices for particular type of cow flesh. Prof D. N. Jha quotes innumerable examples of this in his masterpiece.

The preaching of non violence in India came with the rise of agricultural society. Jainism called for total non violence, while Buddhism talked non-violence; preventing of wasteful animal sacrifice in particular. It was much later that Brahmanism picked up cow as a symbol for Brahmanism in response and as a reaction to non-violence of these religions. Since Brahmanism has asserted itself to be *the* Hinduism it projects as if Cow is holy for Hindus overall. The matter of fact is that many sections of society, more particularly Dalits and Tribal have been eating beef all through. It is another matter that lately with the rising assertion of Hindutva, many a communities which are dependent on beef as a rich and cheap source of protein are gradually being forced to either give it up or do a rethink on that.

In contrast to what is being asserted by BJP and company, Swami Vivekanand had a different take on the issue. He points out speaking to a large gathering in USA said: "You will be astonished if I tell you that, according to old ceremonials, he is not a good Hindu who does not eat beef. On certain occasions he must sacrifice a bull and eat it."

This is corroborated by other research works sponsored by the Ramakrishna Mission established by Swami Vivekananda himself. One of these reads: "The Vedic Aryans, including the Brahmanas, ate fish, meat and even beef. A distinguished guest was honoured with beef served at a meal. Although the Vedic Aryans ate beef, milch cows were not killed. One of the words that designated cow was aghnya (what shall not be killed). But a guest was a goghna (one for whom a cow is killed). It is only bulls, barren cows and calves that were killed.

In response to this bill thousands of workers of Devnar abattoir (Mumbai), who will be losing their jobs came on the streets to protest against this move of the government. Many traders, from different religion also came to Azad Maidan in Mumbai to protest this communal act of the Maharashtra Government. In a PIL filed in the Bombay High Court the petitioner argues that this ban on beef infringes on the fundamental right of citizens to choose meat of their choice is fundamental. The hope is that the society overcomes such abuse of 'identity issues' for political goals and lets the people have their own choices in matters of food habits, and let those who are making their living from this trade do so peacefully.

• • •

## The Social Watch

*Dr Rajeev Joshi*

For thousands of years the man has tried to measure time - the movement along 'fourth dimension'. The devices, used to measure and keep track of this movement, have refined from candle-clock, time-stick, sun-dials, verge escapement mechanism etc. The pendulum clock, invented in 1656, was easily reproducible and became integral part of household appliances. Now various versions of digital clock are still much cheaper and much more easier to assemble. The clock till now only showed time or the 'fourth' dimension.

However, "Ahmed's clock", currently in news, shows a totally different dimension, viz., 'social dimension' - the position where the society has reached, what postures various sections are taking, what influences are acting on the society. There is an urgent need to analyse various aspects and issues to understand this position along the social dimension.

Ahmed Mohammed brought a device which suddenly beeped in the school. Teacher thought that Ahmed was trying to use an object which "looked like a bomb", school authorities "sensed a danger", police were alerted, Ahmed was arrested. It is mentioned in some reports that 'the police overreacted'. The police too must have "sensed a danger".

The 'anti-Islamophobia' group too "sensed a danger", certain sections of media and President Obama "sensed a danger" of 'Islamophobia' and elicited knee-jerk reaction. MIT, Facebook, Twitter and Google offered sops to Ahmed.

Others, particularly those who felt that 'Islamophobia' did not play a role in the action against Ahmed, too "sensed a danger" !

Is this sort of Anxiety Disorder? And that too is it of a wide-spread type?

Some reports say that almost every American would have prima-facie felt that it looked like a bomb. There is mention of one Josh Welch, who was punished, at tender age of 7 years for a Pop-Tart in the shape of a pistol. Then there is one Kendra Turner who was suspended for saying "Bless you" after a student sneezed. There are similar stories about other students also.

It is not known if the hyperactivity problem of Josh was given due primacy over the punitive action or correcting 'behavioural' issues of Kendra was given primacy over her suspension from classes.

It is mentioned that, Ahmed was asked by engineering teacher not to take the device to other places. (It may be that because the engineering teacher was taken into confidence, that teacher did not "sense a danger".) According to the police, Ahmed was "passive aggressive", and didn't give "reasonable answer" as to what he was doing with the case. Unlike with the police, Ahmed reportedly cooperated with media. The behaviour of Ahmed may not be up to expectations, but are any corrective steps taken? This is not known.



The cases mentioned so far revolve around students. It may therefore be of interest to see the process of education, which moulds young mind into a responsible adult.

In India, the role of education, as explained in Sanskrit dictionary by V. S. Apte, remained restricted to training of a particular subject only. Except for 'Panchatantra (5 techniques)' or 'Hitopadesh (beneficial advice)', there is hardly any discussion on social dimensions of education. In fact, fertile land in ancient India gave enough room for hereditary dominance by the few. The story told by the 21st angel in 'Sinhaasan Battishee' (stories by 32 angels decorating a throne) imparts message that personality and qualities are inherited and therefore inborn, and that education plays no role at all.

May be due to limited resources, ancient Western world felt need to use resources primarily for improving society. Process of education had a social dimension. The Latin word 'E+duco' means progress in a particular direction. The word 'educare' means to nurture. The French word 'elever' implies growth in upward direction. Encyclopaedia Britannica description that "Education can be thought of as the transmission of the values and accumulated knowledge of a society. In this sense, it is equivalent to what social scientists term socialization or enculturation", emphasizes that education is necessarily a process of socialisation.

From Plato to Rousseau, Paul Natorp, Immanuel Kant and others, many thinkers have stressed the role of 'social pedagogy'. Pedagogy aims at nurturing a sense of well-being & self-esteem. It necessarily includes not only improving children's skills and physical well-being, but also paying attention to aspirations and anxieties of children and to promote their mental, emotional well-being. Developing communal responsibility, respect for human rights and social justice and making children aware of interdependence of various social units are integral parts of education.

But what is the ground reality in the Western world, where lot of research, thinking and discussions have taken place on the entire process of education in real sense. The initial reaction of Richard Dawkins was "If the reassembled components did something more than the original clock, that's creative. If not, it looks like hoax". Similarly, if the initial reaction of Ahmed's teacher was "it looks like hoax", it may not be uncalled-for. Taslima Nasreen had rightly said that the anxiety of his teachers "is not unfounded." But the problem is much deeper.

Lot many Ahmeds, Joshs, Kendras and others may be on the wrong side of social values. But what role are the teachers playing? Are parents, neighbours, teachers, and the State administration as well, paying attention to aspirations and anxieties of children? Are they promoting their mental, emotional well-being? Are they inculcating communal responsibility, respect for human rights and social justice in minds of the children and making them to realise interdependence between various social units? Are those with all sorts of emotional disturbances taken into confidence rather than being taken into police custody?

It may be that parents, neighbours, teachers, police and others are under stress. Why are such tensions on rise? The number of factors responsible for such stress is large. But some of them are

more important. There are financial reasons. The social reasons have become more acute after 9/11. This naturally raises some questions. Who promoted Laden? Who promoted Saddam? Who attacked Iraq under false and baseless pretext of chemical weapons? Was the 'Game Theory' applied eyeing only the short term gains? Those at the helm of power did not anticipate possible repercussions and after-effects of this myopic policy. Have leaders tendered apologies for their misadventures? Have other leaders at least criticised these policies? Is there a sincere attempt to address basic issues? Unless basic contradictions are resolved, their superficial reflection will never abate. The society advocating personal freedom should ask for freedom from anxiety, social tensions etc.

The end may justify the means, but the old question again arises - What is THE end? Long term view should be taken so that even the day, when the 'Red Giant' steps into our courtyard, is made a happy event.

India has a lot to learn from this. At what position are we in the 'Social Watch'? Muslims are living under insecure atmosphere. But instead of solving the problems, militant, aggressive and divisive forces from both Hindu and Muslim groups are creating and aggravating insecurity in major as well as minor communities. Hanging of a convict was made a high tension, sensational and emotional drama. Such actions will give certain preliminary advantage to respective leaders, but similar to what is happening in the other parts of the world, in the long run these aggressive postures and conflicts will endanger social well-being.

Chosen-few from Marathas, Patidar-Patels and others have cornered more share of the power than the percentage of population of their respective castes, but the ordinary mortals in those castes are by-and-large neglected. To ensure votes from their neglected brethren, emotional appeals are created by demand of reservations to Marathas, Patidars and others. It may not be mere co-incidence that the demand to cancel the reservation policy comes from Gujarat, the home state of Narendra Modi. It is not surprising that RSS supremo Mohan Bhagwat and VHP as well, have mustered courage to support demand to review the reservation policy after this demand is revived from Gujarat.

The religions began with message of peace but followers have resorted to all sorts of violence. It may be difficult for many to realise futility of religion, but at least religion must be restricted to personal spheres and religious preaching should not dominate government policies. The religion must be confined to individual's home, far away public life.

All these craving for immediate and short-lived gains must be controlled. There is urgent need to promote rationality in the minds of people, as the society plays major role in 'educating' pre-school children and imparting informal education to other children. It is definitely an uphill and difficult task. It will take decades to complete. But the torch for promoting social awareness must be held high.

● ● ●

## Intolerance has a Name...

*Aakar Patel*

This intolerance debate has been wrongly framed. Mainly because the opposition is not competent and the government has focused on politics. The questions we are dealing with so far are: Is India becoming intolerant? Is India less or more intolerant than before? etc. Already we can see the vagueness emerging.

Aamir Khan's anguish, which reignited the embers, produced a fresh set of reactions including: 'If India were intolerant, PK would not be a hit' (Shatrughan Sinha), 'if BJP were tolerant, it would show in PM's ability to appreciate Nehru' (Congress) and 'if PM were intolerant he would not have forgiven me' (Smriti Irani). Meanwhile Arun Jaitley has been educating us on intolerance in the Congress 40 years ago and in Germany some decades before that. Clearly, there is no focus, and why should anyone have to subscribe to the Gandhi clan's ancestor worship rituals?

When Aamir said he felt uneasy in the atmosphere prevailing, the BJP produced this magnificent response: "No country in the world is better for Muslims than incredible and unmatched India, and no neighbour was better than a Hindu."

There. Now shut up and stop whining. I could say here that I have a Danish neighbour I almost never see and certainly never hear, whom I prefer to all Hindus who have gone before him (and I doubt, based on my behaviour, whether he agrees that Hindus make for the best neighbours). But that would be digressing. A full 85% of TOI's online readers, tens of thousands of literate people, who were polled on the matter agreed with the BJP's response to Aamir. This did not surprise me because we Indians love ourselves, but also because the BJP fully controls the narrative. This goes: 'look, stuff happens and it has always happened but India is not intolerant so please don't say it is'.

Except that it is not India that is being accused here. Intolerance has a name, and it is Hindutva, not Hindustan.

It is natural that the BJP should seek to conflate the two but it was up to the opposition to bring clarity to the argument. In this it has failed, because it feels forced to keep defending its own blemished record. That shouldn't hold the rest of us back because, like Aamir, all Indians are invested in it. In Parliament and elsewhere Jaitley keeps dragging the debate back to the Congress of Indira and Rajiv. Those who murdered Sikhs have no right to speak of intolerance. Does that justify the doings today of Hindutva on cow and Muslim? It is insulting for Indians to be told that the BJP must be allowed to molest us in 2015 because Congress molested us in 1984.

Jaitley has not won a single election in his life (the Indian voter showing unusually good sense there). Why is he still lecturing us? Because he is the sophisticated face of Hindutva -the assorted yogis and sadhvis we actually elected to Parliament on the promise of development and governance not being particularly presentable. Jaitley has been tasked with drawing the fire away and he's doing that job well.

He should not be allowed to distract us. The problem is, I repeat, Hindutva. The same fires we saw in the past are being stoked, and stoked deliberately. Partly because of political benefit. Partly, this is the scary bit, because of ideology and belief. If the prime minister is seen as silent, we must not assume it is because of a lack of interest.

As an ideology, Hindutva is unappealing, unintellectual, even unaesthetic. It is not attractive enough to be supported fully by even its enthusiasts (some of them lurking nearby) who cough out their objections every so often. But my big problem with Hindutva is that it is also dangerous. The BJP is convinced it can calibrate Hindutva, and that once the benefit is milked, in Muzaffarnagar, in cow politics, it can be switched off or turned down. But we have seen that this is not always possible. And it is Indian citizens who, as they always have, will pay for the recklessness.

The vagueness of the intolerance debate has allowed the Hindutvawadis to position themselves as defenders of India against pernicious troublemakers like Muslim film stars and liberal writers. This is a lie. It should be seen immediately as being such.

This is a political matter only insofar as our ruling party is invested in Hindutva. It is a matter of social and national concern. The opposition's failure to take the debate by the throat (child prodigy Rahul in particular putting up a poor show) mustn't detract the rest of us from addressing it for what it is.

The intolerance debate should have a clear demand: Hindutva must stop poisoning our land.

Courtesy: *Times of India*



## **What a Common Muslim thinks of ISIS Terror?**

*Motiur Rahman Khan*

Paris attack last week (November 13, 2015) came as a shocker for the Muslims of India, who are already living under watching eyes of their friends and neighbors for their 'inherent qualities' of eating beef, 'love jihad', 'intolerant and violent nature', 'keeping more than one wife' and 'breeding like pigs—which ultimately led to increase in their population growth percentage which is more than that of Hindus'. This attack has further added suspicion and has created a trust-deficit among the communities. Many groups organized silent marches in support of Paris all over the country the same day. Everyone was almost more than ready to condemn the barbaric attack in whatever capacity and manner they could have done. Whereas some others, while standing with Parisians in this hour of grief, also questioned the selective pain for Paris as other cities in Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey also suffered such attacks within 36 hours of Paris attack. While all these activities were going on in public spaces, I wanted to understand the common Muslims' perspective: what they discuss in tea shops, at barber's place while waiting for their turn for a hairdo or after disassembling from a formal meeting for a protest

against the attack. My methodology was just listening to these people without intervening into the discussion so that I may not, unnecessarily, inject my understanding of the events. Here is what I gathered from the discussions:

### **Creation of Dayesh (ISIS)**

The so called Arab Spring was actively supported by the West and French, the former colonial masters of the region were more than active in it. The way the ISIS fighters, as their propaganda videos show, run their tanks and possess all the military skills of handling sophisticated weapons and the weapon itself say it loudly that these fighters have been trained by the West intelligence or the defense departments. The West funded and fuelled the rebels of Syria and Iraq with weapons and training to overthrow the Asad regime, who in turn sought help from Shia fighters. This multiplied the problems of the region and neither the Asad regime was toppled nor the rebels remained in the hands of the West. It is a problem with the West that when they do not find a regime of their choice they seek a violent regime change, especially in Middle East (read Muslim countries). In Egypt, first they toppled the Mubarak regime and elections were held, what happened then?, Muslim Brotherhood came into power, Morsi (an elected President), who represented nativists and orthodox Muslims was again toppled to suit the West. Morsi could have again created Suez Canal crisis for Britain and France like Iran did with the oil fields contracts after the Islamic Revolution. Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Husein and the Taliban all were creations of Cold War, where their strategy was to invoke the name of religion and jihad to fight their war as foot soldiers.

### **The Arab Spring could have been dealt with differently**

Rise of Arab Spring was hailed by one and all but nobody was ready to pay any heed to the danger of the rightist political groups such as, Banna inspired Muslim Brotherhood. If the people were not happy with their respective governments, they must have been left to protest peacefully, they must have been given moral support. UN must have kept a watch on the situation and it should have taken actions if required but rebels must not have been armed to match the might of their governments. These groups did not get time to mature their movements, the unparalleled armament and money left them unbridled. They started advancing their own personal ambitions. After all, Burma is on the verge of becoming a democratic country and all these happened with peaceful protests and demands of the people of Burma without any active support from foreign powers. It took time but this transition would be relatively peaceful. They have some of their problems but they have a tradition of mass mobilization and people's intervention, they will handle these peacefully. What is the need of providing monetary and strategic help to the rebels? They do it for the values of democracy? Why states like North Korea, China and Saudi Arabia are not visible to them? Why don't they fund and encourage people from these countries to throw their oppressive regimes?

### **What ISIS wants**

ISIS is either a group of mindless youths, who have no knowledge of basics of Islam or the reincarnation of the '*kharjites*' (*kharji*, a group emerged during the last days of pious caliphates, who were responsible for bringing down the pious caliphate and inciting different violent movements within

Islam, killing a number of friends and relatives of the Prophet), who are mindlessly killing innocent people to satisfy their hunger for power in the Levant or beyond that. They bear no morality prescribed in Islam have no faith in Kaba talk of destroying it as for them revering it is idolatrous. They don't believe in injunctions of even Quran, where it has been prescribed in bold letters that no innocent person be killed and such killing is like murder of all humanity. But certainly they have their political motive behind all their barbaric acts. With their act of terror: butchering innocent people in front of public and on camera, killing people in their suicide attacks and enslaving and killing of women and children is well planned policy. They want to heat the ground for Muslims who are living their lives peacefully all over the world. These acts of theirs with all kind of propaganda are to make Muslims suspicious in the eyes of their friends and neighbors. It is their strategy to make the Muslims insecure in their own homes. So that they are persecuted everywhere and they have no alternative but to leave their peaceful lives. They want all the Muslims to be pushed towards terrorism. ISIS has very dangerous plan to destabilize the peaceful existence of the Muslims all over the world.

### **Refugees**

The people fleeing from the war torn regions have become a problem for Europe and now after the Paris carnage, the debate of admitting or not admitting the refugees into their territories has become very harsh. While a number of people are standing in their support but the voices against giving refuge to such a huge number has become very loud and a section of the Europeans are against allowing Muslim refugees since they think that these Muslims are threat to their national security. Indian Muslims are of opinion that the fleeing from their war torn region is not the solution. It is their duty to fight and struggle into their own countries. If they live and struggle only then they will reach to a solution. Fleeing from their homes is not the solution at all because they are facing much more problems than they could have faced while remaining and struggling for their rights. How can you expect Europe to help you when other nearby Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Quwait and other Middle East countries are not ready to give refuge to you? The people of Syria, Iraq and other affected region should help each other in the time of crisis rather than seeking help from outside world. The organizations/people you are battling with wants you to become refugees and with these tactics only they have become so powerful. Give them a befitting reply by not leaving your home.

It was quite interesting to know the opinion of common Muslims of an international crisis, nearly all of them blamed the West for the present crisis, but at the same time they had a piece of advice for the people of the war torn zone to resist the terror of ISIS and their likes. People were very much critical of Saudi Arabia and the Arab world, which have not only been hostile to the victims of the crisis but also been a part of the problem itself. ISIS, for them, is not only a problem for the world but they are particularly the greatest danger for the Muslims.

*The author teaches Medieval Indian History at PGDAV College (Eve), University of Delhi*

Courtesy: vikalp.ind.in

[mati.du@gmail.com](mailto:mati.du@gmail.com)

## The Disturbing Psychological Impact of Superstitions on Children

*Jenni Wallis*

The world still has its handful of superstitions and mystical, pre-Enlightenment religious beliefs do still hold sway in society. In some Asian cultures the vast number and the disturbing depth of superstitions that dominate can often paralyze the lives of locals and lead to severe anxiety. In Bangladesh, for instance, *tabeej* (or voodoo dolls) can be used to spark fear in others and to incite hate, and these have been known to leave deep emotional and psychological scars on those who are targeted in this manner.

- In the under-developed regions of the world (and especially among those living in poverty), what is known as black magic still runs deep, even though there is absolutely no scientific evidence that could bolster any of their beliefs and claims.
- Superstitions and anti-modern religious beliefs can have devastating psychological and medical consequences, especially on the youth.

### **Brainwashing Children in 21st Century America**

A few years ago, the broader public got a unique opportunity to see how fundamentalist Christian groups go about brainwashing children in the world's most developed country. What many people perhaps assumed could not possibly exist in the 21st century western world not only occurred, but did so without the intervention of child services, even though these fundamentalist youth camps engaged in a form of psychological child abuse. The guiding principle of Jesus Camp is stark and clear: "We believe that there's two kinds of people in this world: people who love Jesus and people who don't." This "us vs. them" mentality opens the doors to fear and paranoia of "the other" and, ultimately, justifies violence, as camp counsellors refer to the struggle between these two types of people as a veritable war.

### **Religion and a Tradition of Child Abuse**

Child abuse -- psychological, physical and sexual -- is one of the threads that links together vastly different religious groups. Most recently, for instance, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish sect called Lev Tahor fled authorities in the Canadian province of Quebec after local child services officials noted that they intended to put the religious colony's underaged members in foster care. It was discovered that the cult's children were shockingly malnourished, lived in filth and showed signs of physical abuse. A total of 120 children fell victim to the mad beliefs of this sect in Quebec's Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts community, where local officials found that kids were drugged by the sect's leaders with melatonin, because they believed that this was the best way to control their behavior. Equally troubling was that girls were required to marry by age 14 and boys who disobeyed authorities were tortured with wire hangers. These stories echo the poor treatment of children on other fundamentalist religious communities, most notably perhaps in the polygamist Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter

Day Saints, a radical off-shoot of the Mormons. As early as 1953, American child welfare authorities had to step in and remove hundreds of children who had been mentally or physically abused.

### **The Consequences of a Brainwashed Childhood**

History is full of examples of what has happened to promising children after extended periods of brainwashing and psychological abuse at the hands of religious organizations. In some parts of India, a belief in so-called "faith healing" often results in criminal neglect of children and the dismissal of essential medical treatments. Even more disturbing is the fact that in some communities in India, skin branding and body modification are still practiced and children end up being the victims of this cruel practice. Not only does this result in permanent scarring, but leads some brainwashed parents to think that by doing this to their children, they can avoid proper treatment by doctors. These are the types of traumatic, scarring childhood experiences that can lead to drug and alcohol addictions in adulthood, as well as serious mental illness, many of which go undiagnosed and untreated. Specialists believe that 45% of mental illnesses are left untreated and those who have had traumatic childhood experiences are more likely to fall into this category.

Anti-Modern superstitions and religious practices should not be seen as quaint, harmless relics of the past. They have the ability to cause real damage, especially among the most vulnerable members of our society.

● ● ●

### **"You are just like us."**

*So it turned out you were just like us!  
Where were you hiding all this time, buddy?  
That stupidity, that ignorance  
we wallowed in it for ages -  
look, it arrived at your shores too!  
Many congratulations to you!*

*Raising the flag of religion,  
I guess now you'll be setting up Hindu Raj?  
You too will start muddling everything up  
You, too, will ravage your beautiful garden.  
You, too, will sit and ponder -  
I can tell preparations are afoot -  
who is [truly] Hindu, who is not.  
I guess you'll be passing fatwas soon!  
Here, too, it will become hard to survive.  
Here, too, you will sweat and bleed.*



*You'll barely make do joylessly.  
You will gasp for air like us*

*I used to wonder with such deep sorrow.  
And now, I laugh at the idea:  
it turned out you were just like us!  
We weren't two nations after all!  
To hell with education and learning.  
Let's sing the praises of ignorance.  
Don't look at the potholes in your path:  
bring back instead the times of yore!  
Practice harder till you master  
The skill of always walking backwards .  
Let not a single thought of the present  
break your focus upon the past!  
Repeat the same thing over and over -  
over and over, say only this:*

*How glorious was India in the past!  
How sublime was India in days gone by!*

*Then, dear friends, you will arrive  
and get to heaven after all.  
Yep. We've been there for a while now.  
Once you are there,  
once you're in the same hell-hole,  
Keep in touch and tell us how it goes*

● ● ●

An Official Journal of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee, India

# THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build

Rationalist Society

Issue - 1



Vol.- 16

**Apr – Jun 2016**

*In this issue...*

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| 2. Caste Panchayat                                      |                       |
| 5. Maharashtra Prohibition of Social Boycott Act, 2015  |                       |
| 11. Should Khap Panchayats be banned in India?          |                       |
| 14. Unlawful interference of Caste Panchayats           |                       |
| 19. Social boycott and the terror of Gavki Panchayat    | <i>Amruta Shedge</i>  |
| 21. Dalits suffer social boycott in Maharashtra village | <i>Pavan Dahat</i>    |
| 23. Boycott Social Boycotting                           |                       |
| 24. Dispensing Justice Through Kangaroo Courts          | <i>Anagha Ingole</i>  |
| 28. Social Boycott of Dalit Scholars                    | <i>Agnes Amala. T</i> |
| 30. Maharashtra to be the First State to Enact Law      | <i>Alok Deshpande</i> |
| 32. Opposing Social Boycott                             |                       |
| 33. Cabinet approves bill against social boycott        |                       |

**Founder**  
**Dr. Narendra Dabholkar**  
**(1945-2013)**

**Editors:**  
**P.K. Nanawaty**  
**Ms Suman Oak**

Email. [pkn.ans@gmail.com](mailto:pkn.ans@gmail.com)

[www.thoughtnaction.co.in](http://www.thoughtnaction.co.in)

## Caste Panchayat

Narendra Dabholkar, the founder of the ANS had started a campaign against the caste panchayats and had organised a series of meetings across the state under the program named 'Jaat panchayat muthmati abhiyan' (Caste Panchayat Eradication Mission). Dabholkar, held a series of meetings as part of this campaign at various places. Meetings were held in Nashik and Pune and plans were made to take the campaign to other parts of the state.

### **Some instances of Jat Panchayat atrocities:**

- 1) At the Pune meeting, the audience heard an 80-year-old man describing how his family was ostracised by members of his 'upper' caste community after his son, who works in the armed forces, traveled out of the country. The octogenarian's family was accused of violating the caste's 'Samudra Bandi' or restrictions on crossing the seas.
- 2) In Nashik, delegates were told that a father killed his nine-month pregnant daughter for daring to choose a man from outside their tribe as her life partner. In this case, the caste panchayat in a tribal village in the district instigated the man to kill the daughter for defiling their community's 'purity'.
- 3) Former corporator, Kaka Dharmavat, Jitendra Sharma and Jagdish Unecha, all residents of Pune, belonging to the Shri Gaur Brahmin community, face excommunication after a member from each of their families is married into a different caste. None of them is allowed to attend any community program or gathering by the community leaders in the city. Dharmavat's niece has married a Maharashtrian Brahmin while Sharma's handicapped brother, after a number of rejections, married a girl from another caste.
- 4) Haresh Pardhi and Sahadeo Padwal, residents of Dhamandevi village in Chiplun taluka, belong to the Bhoi community. Both men married outside their caste 18 years ago. They have been considered outcasts since then, even by their families. No one from their community in the village speaks with their children.
- 5) A mountaineer from a Raigad village, who had climbed the Everest in 2012, was boycotted by villagers because his wife, an advocate, wore jeans and did not sport a mangalsutra or bindi. The couple were isolated, excluded from temple functions and not even allowed to use water from the village tap.
- 6) A Dalit families from Osmanabad district were boycotted by upper caste villagers after a statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar was desecrated and the Dalits filed a police complaint. The Dalits have been denied public water, access to grazing fields for cattle and even groceries in shops. Even though the boycott has been called off, the 13 families continue to live in fear.

The ANS have succeeded in bringing many cases to the public notice where the panchayat was acting as judiciary. ANS is working with the leaders of many castes where this practice is prevalent and trying to convince them how bad is this system and how it obstructs their development. ANS has succeeded in convincing some communities to stop this practice, which include Bhatake Joshi in Nashik, Vaidu

community from Mumbai, Padmashali from Ahmadnagar, Adivasi Gond from Chandrapur and Dombari and Kolhati from Sangli.

Krishna Chandugade, is the co-ordinator of the 'Jaat panchayat muthmati abhiyan'. At present, the police are authorised to register complaints against the caste panchayats but only after getting permission from the home ministry which is time-consuming. Our demand is that the state government should make a law which will declare the activities of caste panchayats illegal.

Avinash Patil, state president of the samiti says, "Hundreds of incidents have been reported at various parts of the state where people have suffered due to the wrath of caste panchayats. Many castes in the state follow the tradition of forming panchayat of senior members of the caste which dictates the rules for the society. If anyone is found violating the rules he will be cast out or slapped a fine. The panchayats run a parallel judiciary where the grievances of the members of the caste are heard and judgments passed. In Raigad district alone, more than 45 cases have been reported in the last one year. The practice continues despite it is unconstitutional.

Dr Hamid Dabholkar active member of ANS and son of slain Dr Narendra Dabholkar says "There are at least three different kinds of boycotts One kind is when a self-appointed panchayat of one's own caste group calls for a boycott of an individual or family; another is when a village, across caste lines, chooses to shun someone living among them; a third kind is when one caste group targets another, as in the case of the Dalit families in Osmanabad."

A division bench of Justices S C Dharmadhikari and S B Shukre took a serious note of the issue while hearing a petition filed by four members of the 'Kunabi' community from Harihareshwar, Raigad district. They are facing social boycott for contesting the local body elections without the consent of their jat (khap) panchayat.

The Bombay High Court has directed the state government to frame guidelines to curb the menace of social boycott. It has also sought to know whether the government is readying a draft law to prevent incidents of excommunication.

### **Bombay Prevention of Excommunication Act, 1949**

Sixty six years ago, when present-day Maharashtra and Gujarat were known as the Bombay province, the state had passed the Bombay Prevention of Excommunication Act, 1949. The focus of that law was to protect the civil, social and religious rights of those excommunicated by their own communities. The law, however, was short-lived. In 1962, after a prolonged legal battle, the Supreme Court declared the Act unconstitutional.

Now, more than 50 years later, Maharashtra has a second chance to deal with the practice of social boycotting with the new bill.

The Bombay Prevention of Excommunication Act was enacted in 1949 largely because of redressal sought by boycotted members of the Dawoodi Bohra community, a close-knit sect of Shia Islam. The Act prohibited the expulsion of any person from his or her religious creed, caste or sub-caste and held any such

excommunication to be invalid. Under the law, no community could deprive a person of their right to property, to worship in religious places, to perform funeral rites or other rituals. In 1951, however, the leader of the Dawoodi Bohras, Syedna Taher Saifuddin, challenged the Prevention of Excommunication Act in the Bombay High Court. The Syedna's contention was that the Act infringed upon his constitutional freedom of religion by curtailing his right, as the religious head, to discipline the community by casting out "errant" members.

When the High Court upheld the Act, the Syedna appealed in the Supreme Court and in 1962, a five-judge bench finally gave a divided verdict. A minority among the judges wanted the Act to be upheld, but the majority Judgement regarded excommunication as a legitimate practice of a community that had to be protected under Article 26 of the Constitution, which grants individuals the freedom to manage religious affairs. The apex court concluded that the Prevention of Excommunication Act was unconstitutional. Technically, the matter isn't over, because reformist Bohras [who had been excommunicated] filed a review petition that is still pending in the Supreme Court," said Irfan Engineer, a human rights activist and reformist Bohra whose father, Asghar Ali Engineer, was boycotted by the Dawoodi Bohras in the 1970s.

All these years later, Engineer believes a new law against social boycott would be a welcome step. "If there is a law, people would fear the repercussions of ostracising others," he said. "In the absence of a law, communities get emboldened to propagate boycotts, as we see with the Bohras or caste panchayats. The call for a new legislation against social boycotting came in 2013, when the Bombay High Court was hearing a petition by two ostracised members of the Koli community from Raigad. The court Ordered the state government to draft a legislation in order to deter the social boycotts imposed by caste panchayats on individuals who transgress caste norms. The court had also insisted that police stations across Maharashtra should treat cases of social boycott by caste panchayats as criminal offences, under sections on conspiracy, intimidation, extortion or promoting enmity between different groups.

● ● ●

### Misplaced Credit

Ms Prabha Purohit was credited for the article **Harrowing Experience of Kanifnath Fair** which appeared in Jan – Mar 2016 issue. However she had sent an email explaining the background as under: *.....on my name is the translation of the article....However the original article, 'आणि पंचांनी काठी आपटली' by Pragati Bankhele appeared in Maharashtra Times. The translation was done by my brother Arun Gokhlay .... You may, please, give due credit to the parties concerned in the next issue....*

Error is regretted. Editor

## Maharashtra Prohibition of Social Boycott Act, 2015.

BILL No. ...of 2015

A BILL to provide for the prohibition of social boycott of a person or group of persons including their family members, and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

WHEREAS promoting amongst the citizens fraternity assuring the dignity of individual is enshrined as one of the goals in the preamble of the Constitution of India;

AND WHEREAS a right to live with human dignity is a recognized fundamental right of a person enshrined in article 21 of the Constitution and also a basic human right inherent in human existence;

AND WHEREAS it has been observed that the dehumanizing practice of social boycott of a person or group of persons including their family members still persists in various parts of the State;

AND WHEREAS it appears that the existing laws are proved to be not effective in total elimination of the evil of social boycott of a person or group of persons including their family members;

AND WHEREAS it is necessary to prohibit social boycott as a matter of social reform in the interest of public welfare; AND WHEREAS with a view to ensure that the people in the State live in harmony with their human rights, it is expedient to provide for the prohibition of social boycott of a person or group of persons including their family members, and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto; it is hereby enacted in the Sixty-sixth Year of the Republic of India as follows:-

Short title and extent and commencement.

1. (1) This Act may be called the Maharashtra Prohibition of Social Boycott Act, 2015.
- (2) It extends to the whole of the State of Maharashtra.

Definitions.

2. (1) In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,-

(a) "Caste Panchayat" means a Committee or a body formed by a group of persons belonging to any community, whether registered or not, which functions within the community to regulate various practices in the same community, controls personal and social behaviour of any member and collectively resolves or decides any disputes amongst their members including their families, by issuing oral or written dictums, whether called as a "panchayat" or a "gavki" or by any other name or description;

(b) "community" means a group, the members of which are connected together by reason of the fact that by birth, conversion or the performance of any religious rites or ceremonies they belong to the same religion or religious creed and includes a caste or sub-caste;

(c) "Government" or "State Government" means the Government of Maharashtra;

(d) "human rights" shall have the same meaning as assigned to it in clause (d) of section 2 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993; 10 of 1994.

- (e) “member” means a person who is a member of any community;
- (f) “Social Boycott Prohibition Officer” means any officer of the Government designated by the State Government, by notification in the Official Gazette, under section 16;
- (g) “social boycott” means the gesture or an act, whether oral or written, of any social discrimination between the members of the community, specified in section 3;
- (h) “victim” means any individual who has suffered or experienced physical, mental, psychological, emotional or monetary harm or harm to his property as a result of the commission of social boycott and includes his relatives, legal guardian and legal heirs.

(2) The words and expressions used but not defined in this Act and defined in the Indian Penal Code, the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 or the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, as the case may be, shall be deemed to have the meanings respectively assigned to them in those enactments.

Social boycott.
-----------------

3. Any member who commits any of the following act or acts shall be deemed to have imposed social boycott on a member of his community:-

- (i) if he prevents or obstructs or causes to prevent or obstructs any member of his community from observing any social or religious custom or usage or ceremony or from taking a part in a social, religious or community functions, congregation, assembly, meeting or procession;
- (ii) if he refuses or denies or causes to refuse or deny any member of his community the right to perform marriage, funeral or other religious ceremonies and rites as the members of his own community usually and ordinarily perform;
- (iii) if he commits or causes to commit social ostracism on any grounds;
- (iv) if he shuns or refuses any member of his community from engaging in the society or cut-of social or commercial ties with such member resulting in making the life of such member miserable;
- (v) if he prevents or obstructs or causes to prevent or obstruct any member of his community from having access to or from using any place used or intended to be used for a charitable, religious or public purpose which is established or maintained wholly or partly by his own community for and on behalf of the community out of the funds of such community and is normally available for use to or by any other member of his own community;
- (vi) if he prevents or obstructs or causes to prevent or obstruct any member of his community from having access to or using the facilities of any school, educational institution, medical institution, community hall, club hall, cemetery, burial ground or any other place used by, or intended to be used by, or for the benefit of, his community;
- (vii) if he prevents or obstructs or causes to prevent or obstruct any member of his community from enjoying any benefit under a charitable trust or waqf created for the benefit of his community;

- (viii) if he incites or provokes or encourages any member of his community, directly or indirectly, to sever social, religious, professional or business relations with any other member or members of his community;
- (ix) if he prevents or obstructs or causes to prevent or obstruct any member of his community from entering, lodging in or otherwise using any place of worship or pilgrimage, which is ordinarily open to the members of his community;
- (x) if he prevents or obstructs or causes to prevent or obstruct any member of his community from establishing or maintaining such social, professional or business relations as he would ordinarily establish or maintain with other members of his community;
- (xi) if he prevents or obstructs or causes to prevent or obstruct any children of his community from playing together with the children of specific family or families in the community;
- (xii) if he obstructs or denies or causes to obstruct or deny any member of his community from enjoying human rights;
- (xiii) if he discriminates or causes to discriminate amongst the members of the community on the basis of morality, social acceptance, political inclination, sexuality or any other basis;
- (xiv) if he creates or causes to create cultural obstacle or compel any member of his community to wear any particular type of clothes or use any specific language;
- (xv) if he expel or causes to expel any member of his community from the said community; and
- (xvi) if he commits any other similar acts.

Prohibition on Assembling  
for Imposing social  
boycott.

4. (1) No person or group of persons shall gather, assemble or congregate at any time and at any place with the view or intention to deliberate on issue of imposing social boycott on any member of the community.

(2) Such gathering or assembly or congregation shall be treated as an unlawful assembly and every person convening and organizing such assembly and every member thereof participating therein shall be punishable with a fine which may extend to one lakh fifty thousand rupees. Prohibition of social boycott.

Prohibition of social  
boycott.

5. The social boycott is hereby prohibited and its commission shall be an offence.

Punishment for social  
boycott.

6. Whoever imposes or causes to impose any social boycott on any member of his community, shall, on conviction, be punished with imprisonment of either description, which may extend to seven years, or with fine which may extend to five lakhs rupees, or with both.

Explanation.- When an offence under this section is alleged to have been committed by a Caste Panchayat, if the offence is alleged to have been committed at the meeting of



such Caste Panchayat, any individual who has voted in favour of the decision or participated in decision regarding social boycott taken in such meeting shall be deemed to have committed the offence.

Punishment for aiding or abetting the offence.

7. Every person who aids or abets the commission of offence under this Act shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years, or with a fine which may extend to three lakh rupees, or with both.

Previous social boycott to be void.

8. (1) If any person happens to have been socially boycotted before coming into force of this Act, such social boycott shall be void and of no effect from the date on which this Act comes into force.

(2) Any Caste Panchayat, who,-

(a) declares that social boycott which is void under this Act is in force; or

(b) behaves in such a manner towards the person who is socially boycotted as to show that such social boycott is still in force, shall be deemed to have committed an offence under the provisions of this Act and shall be liable to be punished accordingly.

Victim to be heard on sentence.

9. If the accused is convicted, the Court shall, hear the victim on the question of sentence, and then only pass the sentence.

Offences to be cognizable and bailable.

10. Any offence punishable under this Act shall be cognizable and bailable and triable by a Metropolitan Magistrate or a Judicial Magistrate of the First Class, as the case may be.

Compounding

11. The offence punishable under this Act may, with the consent of the victim and with the permission of the court, be compoundable:

Provided that, the Court shall, by an order, grant permission for compounding of the offence subject to the condition of performance of community services to be rendered by the accused person, as the court thinks fit.

Procedure to be followed upon receiving complaint.

12. (1) The victim or any member of his family may file a complaint either through the police or directly to the Magistrate.

(2) The Magistrate before whom the complaint is filed under sub-section (1) may direct the police to conduct the investigation.

(3) The Magistrate may also direct the police and other concerned authorities to provide the victim and his family, any kind of assistance or remedy or protection that he thinks necessary during the trial of the case.

Police officer to  
take action.

13. Upon receiving the information of the offence of social boycott under this Act or of the likelihood of commission of social boycott, a police officer may, -

(a) remove, or cause to be removed, any barricade or obstruction erected or placed in any place if such police officer has reasonable ground to believe that the barricade or obstruction was so erected or placed in order to be used for the purpose of committing an offence under this Act;

or

(b) open or cause to be opened any gate or door, if such police officer has reasonable ground to believe that such gate or door has been closed for the purpose of committing an offence under this Act.

Speedy Trial of offences  
by a Magistrate.

14. To ensure speedy justice, the trial shall be completed within a period of six months from the date of filing of the charge sheet.

Power to prevent  
certain acts

15. (1) Where the Collector or District Magistrate, as the case may be, receives information that there is likelihood of convening of unlawful assembly for imposition of Social Boycott, he shall, by order, prohibit the convening of any such unlawful assembly and doing of any act towards the commission of any offence under this Act by any person in any areas specified in the order.

(2) The Collector or District Magistrate, as the case may be, may take such steps as he thinks necessary to give effect to such order, including giving of appropriate directives to the police authorities.

Social Boycott  
Prohibition Officer.

16. (1) The State Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, designate any officer of the Government, as the Social Boycott Prohibition Officer as it may consider necessary and may also notify the area or areas within which he shall exercise the powers and perform the duties conferred upon him by or under this Act.

Functions of Social  
Boycott Prohibition  
Officer.

17. It shall be the functions of the Social Boycott Prohibition Officer, -

(a) to detect the commission of offences under the provisions of this Act by any person in the area of his jurisdiction, by taking such action as he deems fit and to report such cases to the Magistrate;

(b) to assist the Magistrate while he is trying the offences and its proceedings under this Act;

(c) to assist the police officers in discharge of their duties under this Act;

(d) to see that the order of community services passed by the Magistrate is implemented, and to forward a report to the court regarding compliance of such order from the accused;

(e) to submit his quarterly report regarding his work to the Magistrate and to the Superintendent of Police or the Commissioner of Police, as the case may be;

(f) to discharge such other functions as may be assigned to him by the State Government.

Compensation to  
victim.

18. When a Magistrate imposes a sentence of fine, the Court may, when passing judgment, order the whole or any part of Compensation to victim. the fine recovered to be given to the victim and his family, as the compensation.

Burden of proof on  
accused.

19. Notwithstanding anything contained in the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, in any trial for the offences punishable under this Act, the burden of proving that no offence under this Act have been committed by the accused, shall lie on the accused.

Act not in derogation of  
any other law.

20. The provisions of this Act shall be in addition to and not in derogation of, the provisions of any other law for the time being in force.

Framing charges  
under Indian Penal Code.

21. While framing charges for the offences under this Act, the Magistrate may also frame charges under sections 34, 120-A, 120-B, 149, 153-A, 383 to 389 and 511 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, or any other provision of that Code, if the fact disclose the commission of an offence under those provisions. 45 of 1860.

22. (1) The State Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, make rules to carry out the purposes of this Act.

Power to  
make rules.

(2) Every rule made under this Act, shall be laid, as soon as may be, after it is made, before each House of the State Legislature, while it is in session for a total period of thirty days, which may be comprised in one session or in two or more successive sessions, and if, before the expiry of the session in which it is so laid or the session or sessions immediately following, both Houses agree in making any modification in any rule or both Houses agree that the rule should not be made, and notify their decision to that effect in the Official Gazette, the rule shall, from the date of publication of a notification in the Official Gazette, of such decision have effect only in such modified form or be of no effect, as the case may be; so, however, that any such modification or annulment shall be without prejudice to the validity of anything previously done or omitted to be done under that rule.

23. (1) If any difficulty arises in giving effect to the provisions of this Act, the State Government may, as occasion arises, by an order published in the *Official Gazette*, do anything not inconsistent with the provisions of this Act,

Power to remove  
difficulties.

which appears to it to be necessary or expedient for the purpose of removing the difficulty:

(1) Provided that, no such order shall be made under this subsection after the expiry of a period of two years from the date of commencement of this Act.



## Should Khap Panchayats be banned in India?

Khap Panchayats have no legal recognition and they interfere with normal functioning of society by making decisions. It is not the job of Khap Panchayats to make decisions in Republic of India.

### Answer 1

Yes, Absolutely yes. You still need justice from 600 AD or are you moving to be a civilized country? On 24 May, 23-year-old Meenakshi Kumari and her 15-year-old sister fled their village in Baghpat district with their family, fearing violence after their brother eloped with a married woman from a Jat (dominant caste) family. On 30 May, their house in the village was ransacked. On 30 July, members of a village khap panchayat– an unelected all-male village council - ordered that Meenakshi Kumari and her sister be raped and paraded naked, with their faces blackened, as punishment for the actions of their brother. The family continue to fear for their safety. Another brother, Sumit Kumar, said, “In the panchayat, the Jat decision is final. They don’t listen to us. The police don’t listen to us. The police said anyone can be murdered now.” On 5 August, Meenakshi Kumari filed a petition before the Supreme Court seeking protection for her family so that they can return to their home. The family also says they are concerned for the safety of the Jat woman who eloped with her brother, who claims that she is pregnant with his child. Meenakshi Kumari’s father has lodged a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, alleging harassment by the police and the dominant caste family. On 18 August, the Supreme Court ordered Uttar Pradesh authorities to reply to the petition by 15 September. “After we went to the Supreme Court, the villagers are even more aggressive,” said Sumit Kumar.

### Answer 2

Oh really? And what law will you use to ban them? The Constitution promises *freedom of peaceful assembly and of expression*, so how exactly do you plan to do that?

Khap Panchayats are not illegal juntas, *they are age-old* (Much older than Republic of India, that is) *social institutions to which subscription is voluntary*, their decisions are not binding, and people routinely do knock on Courts when they fail to deliver a decision, or are not satisfied with it. *Khap Panchayats sort out a plethora of social and legal issues in villages starting from petty fisticuffs and minor disagreements to grazing land, playground, water and fodder distribution in villages, land disputes, marital disputes, division of ancestral property, and common-resource management in villages and most noticeably, social customs.* Do you really want all these cases to go to the overburdened judiciary, and take several years to resolve, by what time the dispute would have become irrelevant anyway? The rural-folk neither have the money, nor the expertise to handle these situation in a court of law.

Plus there are several other things: People who readily stand as witness in a Panchayat full of their peers, and speak truth, would feel way more uncomfortable doing it in a court. In many cases, especially land dispute, there are no documentary evidence, all the evidence exists is the elders and their witness to

the past. Panchayats handles delicate issues like marriages and divorces/estrangements with swiftness and consensus of both the parties, they are not illegitimate bodies who push their own form of justice on the weak and unsupported. Every person is allowed to present their version, witnesses, and proofs -- Khap Panchayats are drivers of the village republics Gandhi wanted in our country.

Contrary to popular perception, Khap Panchayats don't order murders, *they are committed by the overzealous family members* of the eloped couples (majorly the girl's side), because they feel dishonoured at their acts. The strongest sentences given by Khap Panchayat are the *Excommunications*, that the violaters be given the silent treatment by the rest of the village, no business, of any kind are allowed with them. They are, however, allowed the usage of all the benefits allowed to general public (Roads/Streets/Wells/Temples/River Water/Public Transport). Other usually stringent advice that is given is to leave the village (The alternate to excommunication).

Another thing, not all Khap Panchayats work in tandem, most of them are village/Gotra specific, and they are inherently democratic institutions. Panches are decided by the people themselves, and *any particular orthodox Panch is likely to be removed in favour of someone more reconciliatory*. My village, for instance, has a very reform-driven Panchayat, we have inter-caste marriages, love-marriages, adopted kids, and there is no institutionalised casteism. Compared with that, our neighbouring villages are known for their orthodoxy. So, not all Khap Panchayats are bad. And you can choose which one to follow. For all the noise it generated, that Khap Panchayat which banned Jeans, Phones and noodles for women didn't find any takers in my village.

Today I hear, that a retired Supreme Court judge would be probed in a sexual harassment case. Will you also suggest that Supreme Court be closed down because of this? This condescending attitude of people who have no inkling about how the rural India functions and their Top-Down approach about solving all problems it encounters is very very disheartening.

If you really want to ban some organisations, why don't you go after the Shiv Sena, the known baiter of weak and poor, the height of Goondagiri? Or Vishwa Hindu Parishad? Or those millions of Babaji's and their religious trusts, starting from Asaram to Nithyananda and who not. Believe me, they have done way more harm to the Republic of India, then Khap Panchayats ever did.

### Answer 3

No .Absolutely not. It is against our fundamental rights i e freedom of speech. These persons should be taught about our law, administration and constitution. They are following set social traditions and customs. They have to be made up-to-date to understand the modern requirements and should be able to change themselves according to time. Modern Education may make desired changes. No doubt the govt is making efforts in this time but it will take some more time to suit the present requirements. Mostly modern khap leaders are now educated and they had left many old traditional customs like not allowing girl child to send to schools, girl foeticide, caste rivalry or less such things are in news . Intercaste marriages and mariages in same gotra etc may also be allowed in due course of time. There is shortage in

reporting the incidents of brutality towards women , domestic violence etc . Govt policies for women empowerment is working fairly in this aim too.

**Answer 4**

Yes definitely!! Saw their interviews on TV and YouTube, I'm really surprised why our stupid government doesn't take any action do anything. These uneducated and illiterate old farts claim that they're maintaining the "purity" of their race by conducting panchayats to ensure a marriage between same gothras. If the girl marries someone from different gothra, the girl and the guy are subjected to flogging, stoning to death etc by their own parents!!! Seriously, What the fuck is happening in this country? How is this democratic? The most messed up part is that the parents and the local police are fine with it. And what's even more shocking is that some people are fine with it by tagging it as "freedom of expression". So I can easily assume that togaida and owiasi have freedom of expression as well. Last but not the least, what happened to the "freedom of expression" rights for the girl who wants to marry someone from different gothra/caste?

**Answer 5**

Of course it should be banned... Their ideologies are almost like taliban... They are like talibanis minus AK-47 and grenades...

How to handle these assholes..?

Well.. the old people can't be reformed... these illiterate bunch of shitheads will die in passage of time... The sooner... the better...

The younger generation should be targeted... reforms can be brought via them only... Govt should stress a lot on women literacy, female foeticide should be strictly dealt with..

Maximum exposure should be given to youth through social networking platforms... Its only when they will interact on social networking platform with the entire world, they will realize that they are living in a patriarchal society and their ideologies are of stone age and completely outdated...

Once they feel, they have lagged far behind the modern times, only then they will at least think of reforming. Rather than being ashamed of their barbaric practices, currently they are proud of their so called shitty caste system...

They should be made aware how the world views them... and what sort of scumbags they are... I'm ashamed that people who treat women like these still exist in free India..... The khap's are both... Threat and Embarrassment to humanity...

...

## Unlawful interference of Caste Panchayats etc.with marriages

### Statement of Objects and Reasons

There has been a spurt in illegal intimidation by self-appointed bodies for bringing pressure against Sagotra marriages and inter-caste, inter-community and inter-religious marriages between two consenting adults in the name of vindicating the honour of family, caste or community. In a number of cases, such bodies have resorted to incitement of violence and such newly married or couples desirous of getting married have been subjected to intimidation and violence which has also resulted into their being hounded out of their homes and sometimes even murdered. Although such intimidation or acts of violence constitute offences under the Indian Penal Code, yet, it is necessary to prevent assemblies which take place to condemn such alliances. This Bill is therefore, proposed to nip the evil in the bud and to prevent spreading of hatred or incitement to violence through such gatherings. The Bill is designed to constitute special offences against such assemblies, in addition to other offences under the Indian Penal Code.

1. Incidents of murder and other grave offences committed against persons marrying or proposing to marry sagotras or outside their castes/religions are periodically reported. It is learnt that number of cases goes unreported for fear of reprisals or cascading effects. The intervention of caste/community assemblies in the name of 'Khap Panchayats', 'Katta Panchayats' etc. in the occurrence of these offences and other related incidents involving serious life and liberty consequences, are frequently noticed. Such assemblies gathered on caste lines assume to themselves the power and authority to declare on and deal with 'objectionable' matrimonies and exhibit least regard for life and liberty and are not deterred by the processes of administration of justice. The penal law lacks direct application to the illegal acts of such caste assemblies and needs to be amended. Meanwhile innocent youth are harassed and victimized while such assemblies continue to wield unhindered authority and also seem to resist any suggestion of being subjected to any social control.
2. The pernicious practice of Khap Panchayats and the like taking law into their own hands and pronouncing on the invalidity and impropriety of Sagotra and inter-caste marriages and handing over punishment to the couple and pressurizing the family members to execute their verdict by any means amounts to flagrant violation of rule of law and invasion of personal liberty of the persons affected.
3. Sagotra marriages are not prohibited by law, whatever may be the view in olden times. The Hindu Marriage Disabilities Removal Act, 1946 was enacted with a view to dispel any doubts in this regard. The Act expressly declared the validity of marriages between the Hindus belonging to the same 'gotra' or 'pravara' or different sub-divisions of same caste. The Hindu Marriage Act does not prohibit sagotra or inter-caste marriages.
4. The views of village elders or family elders cannot be forced on the willing couple and no one has a right to use force or impose far-reaching sanctions in the name of vindicating community honour or

family honour. There are reports that drastic action including wrongful confinement, persistent harassment, mental torture, infliction of severe bodily harm is resorted to either by close relations or some third parties against the so-called erring couple either on the exhortations of some or all the Panchayatdars or with their connivance. Social boycotts and other illegal sanctions affecting the young couple, the families and even a section of local inhabitants are quite often resorted to. The cumulative effect of all such acts have also public order dimensions.

5. In a very recent case – Arumugam Servai vs. State of Tamil Nadu [reported in (2011) 6 SCC 405], the Supreme Court strongly deprecated the practice of khap/katta panchayats taking law into their own hands and indulging in offensive activities which endanger the personal lives of the persons marrying according to their choice.
6. Some proposals are being mooted proposing amendments to Section 300 I.P.C. by way of including what is called 'Honour Killing' as murder and shifting the burden of proof to the accused. These proposals have been studied. The views from various quarters at an informal level have also been ascertained. After a preliminary examination of these and certain other models of law, a broad framework of proposed law to deal with the situation has been prepared and annexed herewith. The views of the public are invited with reference thereto.
7. The idea underlying the aforesaid provisions is that there must be a threshold bar against congregation or assembly for the purpose of discussing on and objecting to the conduct of young persons of marriageable age marrying according to their choice, the ground of objection being that they belong to the same gotra or to different castes or communities. The Panchayatdars or caste elders have no right to interfere with the life and liberty of such young couples whose marriages are permitted by law and they cannot create a situation whereby such couples are placed in a hostile environment in the village/locality concerned and exposed to the risk of safety. Such highhanded acts have a tendency to create social tensions and disharmony too. No frame of mind or belief based on social hierarchy can claim immunity from social control and regulation, in so far as such beliefs manifest themselves as agents of enforcement of right and wrong. The very assembly for an unlawful purpose viz. disapproving the marriage which is otherwise within the bounds of law and taking consequential action should be treated as an offence as it has the potential to endanger the lives and liberties of individuals concerned.
8. The proposed law is not in derogation of the provisions of Indian Penal Code which can take care of various offences of serious nature perpetrated by the members of caste panchayats in prosecution of their unlawful objective.
9. The Commission is prima facie of the view that there is no need for introducing a provision in Section 300 IPC in order to bring the so-called 'honour killings' within the ambit of this provision. The existing provisions in IPC are adequate enough to take care of the situations leading to overt acts of killing or causing bodily harm to the targeted person who allegedly undermined the honour of the caste or community. The motive behind killing a person does not furnish real justification to introduce a



separate provision in section 300, as is contemplated to be done under the proposed Bill (as published in the newspapers). Probably, the addition of such clause may create confusion and interpretational difficulties.

10. Further, shifting the onus on to the accused facing accusations of involvement in the serious offence of murder etc or abetment thereof is not desirable. Such a move will be against the cardinal principles of jurisprudence accepted and absorbed into our criminal justice system. If burden of proof has to be shifted in such a case, logically, it will have to be done in a large number of other heinous crimes. A holistic approach is called for and any attempt to drastically expand the rigour of criminal procedure to cope up with ad hoc situations may be counter-productive. The introduction of such a drastic provision needs to be avoided. As an alternative to this, the Commission is of the prima facie view that a presumption could be raised in respect of commission of the prohibited acts in clauses of the proposed Bill, if he or she is a member of an unlawful assembly convened for the purpose of discussing and condemning the perfectly legal conduct of a young couple – married or intending to marry. This is necessary having regard to the fact that the task of identification of roles that may be played by one or more members of assembly, is difficult to accomplish as the eyewitnesses may not be willing to depose and the circumstantial evidence will not be strong enough to implicate the guilty. In such a situation, the presumption as envisaged by clause will assume a significant role.
11. In this context, the Commission feels that the analogy sought to be drawn from the provisions of the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 is not appropriate for more than one reason. 'Sati' is a barbaric, deeply entrenched social evil which was prevalent in certain parts of the country. The magnitude and seriousness of that evil cannot be compared to the problem on hand. More important, the offence of 'Sati' always remained an open affair with all the rituals and ceremonies attached to it and the persons actively participating therein could be identified without difficulty. The accusations in such cases are based on solid evidence.

Courtesy: The Law Commission of India

● ● ●

## To ban social boycotts, Maharashtra may get a second chance

*Aarefa Johari*

In a state where self-appointed caste panchayats routinely ostracise people for transgressing social norms, the government is finally taking a step forward. This monsoon session, the Maharashtra government is due to table a draft bill to prevent social boycotts in the state assembly.

Chief minister Devendra Fadnavis had announced in March that the Prevention of Social Boycott and Protection from Jaat Panchayat Bill would be ready in three months, but the state's social justice department is yet to finish working on it. Meanwhile, activists rooting for a stringent law against various forms of social boycott are unclear about the scope of the bill: if a new law is enacted, will it penalise just intra-caste ostracism or boycotts across caste lines? Will the bill focus on caste alone, or encompass excommunication cases in all religious groups?

Sixty six years ago, when present-day Maharashtra and Gujarat were known as the Bombay province, the state had passed the Bombay Prevention of Excommunication Act, 1949. The focus of that law was to protect the civil, social and religious rights of those excommunicated by their own communities. The law, however, was short-lived. In 1962, after a prolonged legal battle, the Supreme Court declared the Act unconstitutional.

Now, more than 50 years later, Maharashtra has a second chance to deal with the practice of social boycotting with the new bill.

### **The first Act and its fall**

The Bombay Prevention of Excommunication Act was enacted in 1949 largely because of redressal sought by boycotted members of the Dawoodi Bohra community, a close-knit sect of Shia Islam. The Act prohibited the expulsion of any person from his or her religious creed, caste or sub-caste and held any such excommunication to be invalid. Under the law, no community could deprive a person of their right to property, to worship in religious places, to perform funeral rites or other rituals.

In 1951, however, the leader of the Dawoodi Bohras, Syedna Taher Saifuddin, challenged the Prevention of Excommunication Act in the Bombay High Court. The Syedna's contention was that the Act infringed upon his constitutional freedom of religion by curtailing his right, as the religious head, to discipline the community by casting out "errant" members.

When the High Court upheld the Act, the Syedna appealed in the Supreme Court and in 1962, a five-judge bench finally gave a divided verdict. A minority among the judges wanted the Act to be upheld, but the majority judgment regarded excommunication as a legitimate practice of a community that had to be protected under Article 26 of the Constitution, which grants individuals the freedom to manage religious affairs. The apex court concluded that the Prevention of Excommunication Act was unconstitutional.

“Technically, the matter isn’t over, because reformist Bohras [who had been excommunicated] filed a review petition that is still pending in the Supreme Court,” said Irfan Engineer, a human rights activist and reformist Bohra whose father, Asghar Ali Engineer, was boycotted by the Dawoodi Bohras in the 1970s.

### **Time for a New Law**

All these years later, Engineer believes a new law against social boycott would be a welcome step. “If there is a law, people would fear the repercussions of ostracising others,” he said. “In the absence of a law, communities get emboldened to propagate boycotts, as we see with the Bohras or caste panchayats.”

The call for a new legislation against social boycotting came in 2013, when the Bombay High Court was hearing a petition by two ostracised members of the Koli community from Raigad. The court ordered the state government to draft a legislation in order to deter the social boycotts imposed by caste panchayats on individuals who transgress caste norms. The court had also insisted that police stations across Maharashtra should treat cases of social boycott by caste panchayats as criminal offences, under sections on conspiracy, intimidation, extortion or promoting enmity between different groups.

Since then, the state has seen several instances of individuals and families being boycotted for various reasons, most often for marrying within the same gotra (clan) or outside the prescribed boundaries of caste. But different kinds of cases keep popping up. Last year, for instance, a mountaineer from a Raigad village, who had climbed the Everest in 2012, was boycotted by villagers because his wife, an advocate, wore jeans and did not sport a mangalsutra or bindi. The couple were isolated, excluded from temple functions and not even allowed to use water from the village tap.

In April, 13 Dalit families from Osmanabad district were boycotted by upper caste villagers after a statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar was desecrated and the Dalits filed a police complaint. The Dalits have been denied public water, access to grazing fields for cattle and even groceries in shops. Even though the boycott has been called off, the 13 families continue to live in fear.

### **Different shades of boycotts**

These different cases have raised questions about the scope of the new bill being drafted against social boycott.

There are at least three different kinds of boycotts,” said Hamid Dabholkar, member of the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti and son of slain rationalist Narendra Dabholkar. One kind is when a self-appointed panchayat of one’s own caste group calls for a boycott of an individual or family; another is when a village, across caste lines, chooses to shun someone living among them; a third kind is when one caste group targets another, as in the case of the Dalit families in Osmanabad.

In April, when the Maharashtra government had started drafting the new bill, Dabholkar’s Samiti submitted its own draft for the state to consider. “We included the first two kinds of social boycott within the purview of our draft, because there are already laws in place to deal with inter-caste discrimination,” said Hamid Dabholkar. “For now, it is important to crackdown on caste panchayats, which work as completely

unconstitutional parallel justice systems. But in the long run, there is ample scope to expand a law against social boycott.”

Mumbai-based lawyer Mihir Desai also points out that the draft bill could make a distinction between “excommunication” – removing an individual from one’s religious group – and social boycott. The latter, he says, is a vague term that could imply depriving someone of their basic civil rights or simply refusing social interaction with them.

“What we need is a broad anti-discrimination law that governs both public and private life,” said Desai.

Fifty years after court struck down law to ban social boycotts, Maharashtra may get a second chance.

<http://scroll.in/article/734977/fifty-years-after-court-struck-down-law-to-ban-social-boycotts-maharashtra-may-get-a-second-chance>

Courtesy: Scroll.in

• • •

## **Social boycott and the terror of Gavki panchayat in Raigad district**

*Amruta Shedge*

We may believe that in the 21st century inequities like social boycott may be a thing of the past. But Raigad district in Maharashtra has again shown the harsh truth of our society. 'Gavki Panchayat', a system that acts like Khap or Jat panchayat, exists in the interior parts of Maharashtra. It has socially boycotted many families in different villages of Raigad.

Seventy-year-old Shivram Wanghule and his wife Subhadra Wanghule have been living in Raigad district's Telang village for the past 25 years. Shivram was a textile mill worker in Mumbai. In 1990, when all the textile mills in Mumbai went on a strike and later shut down, Shivram left Mumbai and came back to his village. Shivram has no children. He gets Rs 600 as pension from the government. This is his only income. Now after spending half of his life in Telang village his own villagers have boycotted him over a pity issue. Shivram has one room in Mumbai and after leaving Mumbai he gave that room on rent to some of his villagers who were working in Mumbai. Later when Shivram needed money for his treatment he decided to sell that room and so asked the villagers to vacate the room, but they refused and asked him to pay 1 lakh rupees to the 'Gavki'. When Shivram refused to pay the money, the entire village boycotted him.

"I have one room in Mumbai. As I don't stay there I had given it to my fellow villagers who were working in Mumbai. One day, suddenly they came with a blank stamp paper and asked me to sign it. I asked them about it but they did not say anything.

"When I refused to sign it, they asked me to pay 1 lakh rupees to the Gavki. How will I get such a huge amount of money? And so the Gavki boycotted us. Nobody can talk to us. Whoever talks Gavki punishes them with 1 lakh rupees. At this age we have no option but to live this way," said Shivram.

Telang is a small village of around 30 households. With no electricity, no proper roads, Shivram has to walk to the other village to get essential items. Shivram is a diabetic patient. With wrinkled face and shaky hands he explains his hard life.

"I have diabetes. I cannot even walk empty stomach. Just few days before someone came to threaten me. I often receive threats and once they said that they will beat me and break my limbs. What will I do? I did not tell this to police. "

Surprisingly some politicians are supporting the Gavki panchayat. Bharat Gogawle, Shiv Sena MLA from Raigad, said, "What is wrong in that? If that person is not listening to the Gavki panchayat what is the other way left?". Shivram registered a complaint with police against 28 people from Gavki, but all were bailed out immediately.

Gavki is similar to Khap or Jat Panchayat. Though Gavki is not totally based on caste and religion, social boycott is the common link among them. In Gavki panchayat, a few elderly people who are politically and financially strong come together and make decisions. Whoever disagrees the Gavki, is boycotted. Social boycott is also used in matters related to land and money.

While covering different stories of social boycott, I have met 16-year-old Raj Talekar. Raj lives in Roha village of Raigad. Raj lost his father 2 years back. But soon after his death, the entire village boycotted Raj's mother Mohini (35) and her two sons. It all started during Holi festival when Mohini did not allow her children to participate in the function because of their exams. On this issue, Gavki panchayat boycotted Mohini and her children. Raj said that the Gavki members started to trouble them more. On one occasion, his mother was attacked by the members of Gavki. On November 28, Mohini committed suicide due to the repeated harassment.

"When mother did not allow us to go for Holi, boys from the village started abusing us. They did not allow us to talk to any villager. And no one from the village was allowed to talk to us. Once they came to my uncle's place and attacked my mother. After that, she committed suicide and wrote in the suicide note that, she has no more patience to tackle the harassment by Gavki panchayat," said Raj.

After Mohini's death, the family registered a complaint with the police against the Gavki members. Many of them were absconding, but when Headlines Today broadcast this story, 30 people from Gavki panchayat were arrested, including 15 women. Maharashtra has witnessed several such cases of social boycott in the recent past. The cases of social boycott in Raigad have also drawn attention of the High Court. In last 10 months, 35 such cases were registered and only 18 cases are on police record. Now these cases are under the Home Ministry for further action. Remaining cases are pending with local civic bodies. Gavki Panchayat has no legal backing.

Coming down heavily on caste panchayats in Maharashtra, the Bombay High Court had asked the government to come out with "a strong legislation" to curb the social boycotts these bodies often impose on those who defy them. The court also asked the Home Department to forward a circular of September 30 to all the police stations, which says that social boycott by a caste panchayat should be treated as an offence under the Indian Penal Code. Here, every case has different angle. The reasons behind social boycott are

also different. Gavki is an illegal system that runs parallel to the democratic system, but unfortunately there is no law to prevent such activities.

"Victims of social boycott must have the protection of law. Many people face injustice as there is no law to deal with such cases. It is dangerous in a democratic setup to run such parallel systems, which control society illegally. There is no law to check such incidents and in many cases the 'Excommunication Act' - 1962 is executed, but the shocking thing is, it has not been made into a law but remained a bill. The enforcement authorities failed to tackle such cases due to the absence of a particular law against social boycott and Gavki," said Jayant Dhulap, senior journalist.

After a long independence struggle, the country has received equality and freedom. But even today, in states like Maharashtra, the evil tradition of social boycott still exists, and people are still struggling to get their basic rights.

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/social-boycott-and-the-terror-of-gavki-panchayat-in-raigad-district/1/408126.html>

Courtesy: India today

...

## **Dalits suffer social boycott in Maharashtra village**

*Pavan Dahat*

Suman Tayde, 14-month-old Dipti's grandmother is growing anxious as the child has gone without milk since Saturday. The village hasn't run out of supplies, but since October 12, Dalits of Vairagad village in Maharashtra's Buldhana district have been facing a social boycott. This includes inaccess to the flour mill and other shops in the village.

On Monday, Suman went to Balaji Kunte, a caste Hindu, and tried to convince him to spare some milk for Dipti. Balaji Kunte's wife told her, "If we give you milk, our caste people would punish us with social boycott."

"We are living on rice. Now they (caste Hindus) are threatening that the road leading to our locality would be blocked", said Tulsabai Telgote, Suman's neighbour. "Frightened by this, our girls have not stepped out of house since Saturday," Tulsabai added.

On January 26, 2013, caste Hindus in Vairagad refused to allow Dalits to put up B.R. Ambedkar's photo alongside those of other leaders during the Republic Day ceremony.

"We were silent then but on the day of Maha Shivratri in May this year, they uprooted a Panchashil flag (a Buddhist flag) near the Ambedkar statue. They put up a saffron flag in its place", claims Jagdish Bhandare, an elderly man. Most of the Dalits in Vairagad are landless laborers, and work in farms belonging to caste Hindus. Since the Maha Shivratri incident, labourers from the Dalit locality haven't been allowed to work in the farms, they claim.

On October 12, however, tensions flared up with the caste Hindus allegedly attacking Dalits over a dispute. Dalits claim that the upper castes Hindus resorted to verbal abuse of Dalit women, hurled stones at the Ambedkar statue and filed "false complaints of thefts" against Dalit men leading to the arrest of 15 Dalits under different sections of the Indian Penal Code.

"On October 12, some of our women were offering prayers near the Ambedkar statue to the Bodhivruksha tree before leaving for Nagpur to attend the Dhammachakra Pravartan Din ceremony at Deeksha Bhoomi (Celebrations of Dalits converting to Buddhism on October 14, 1956 under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar). Some caste Hindus came and spoke to them in a lewd manner", recalls Ratnabai Wankhede.

"Suddenly, they attacked us. Within five minutes, the village Sarpanch Amol Sathe came with other caste Hindus and started beating us", she said. Meera received severe injuries on her hand during this attack.

The police who reached the spot lathi-charged the Dalits and not the caste Hindus, they say. "Police even arrested 15 Dalit men on false charges of stealing a Goddess's ornaments from a temple near the Ambedkar statue. They did not register our complaints", alleged Meera.

"After the Maha Shivratri incident, autorickshaws did not take us to school. We had to walk for more than three kilometres to our school in Undri village", said Shivani, a secondary school student adding that some of "them (caste Hindus) wrote abusive words about us and Baba Saheb ( Dr.Ambedkar) on the road leading to our school".

But the caste Hindus and the police have denied all the allegations. According to Police Inspector Santosh Tale, there is no "boycott" of Dalits in Vairagad village.

"There was a small incident and some political elements are trying to take advantage of the situation by flaring up sentiments. We have arrested 15 people from the Dalit locality and 10 people from the caste Hindu locality for rioting for October 12 incident", Inspector Tale told The Hindu.

Buldhana Superintendent of Police Shamrao Dihgavkar supported the claims of Inspector Tale and said the situation in the village is peaceful after a "small incident".

On the false cases of theft on Dalits, the SP said, "Only an inquiry into it can make the things clear."

Caste Hindus refuted the allegations that there is social boycott of Dalits in the village. "Ours is a peaceful village. It was small incident but some political elements are trying to disrupt peace here", said Mangesh Sathe, the Sarpanch's brother.

Amol Sathe, the village Sarpanch, who represents the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has been booked and was arrested under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 on Monday.

He has been released but has been prohibited from entering the village, said the SP.

Some of the Dalits don't want to stay in the village anymore. "Give us alternate land and we will shift out of this place otherwise someday, they (caste Hindus) will kill some of us", shouted Sindhu Tayade, another

woman injured in the October 12 attack, in front of the deputy collector who came to take the stock of the situation.

Courtesy: The Hindu

• • •

## Boycott Social Boycotting

Picture your community ostracising you even if you hadn't committed a crime. Your 'crime' could simply have been offending someone's sentiments. Devendra Fadnavis wants to do away with such social boycotts.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis deserves kudos. One is not talking about his engaging in open letter conversations with journalists - that would need a separate column. The CM is driving a law to punish "social boycotts" inflicted by the parallel and more real "legal" system that controls society. The law is bound to provoke controversy, and with it, would emerge public discourse that would create greater awareness.

The new law that is being championed by Fadnavis seeks to make it a crime to socially boycott any member of society. If there were a single most-hurtful action that could be inflicted upon any human being, it would be to ignore his existence. Man is a social animal and typically depends on others in his social community. Even if he were reclusive by nature, he would need to acquire something that he just has to consume. That would entail interaction with other members of society. If he were a persona non grata and everyone around him were to pretend that he did not exist, he would have a living death.

Even a jail term may not break the will of a human being to live, but when a person comes out of jail - even if he had gone in just as an under-trial - and faces the stigma that makes him unemployable, unmarried and even an untouchable, he is sure to contemplate suicide. Now picture your community ostracising you even if you had committed no crime against the law of the land. Your "crime" could simply have been offending someone's sentiments. The consequences can be devastating.

Examples of disputes of this nature abound. Some have even spilled into the courts. A Parsi priest was not allowed to offer prayers in a temple owned by the community's panchayat. The next-of-kin of a dead Bohri activist was not given land for burial in the community burial ground. A panchayat in Maharashtra imposed a "fine" on a married couple for getting married despite belonging to the same "gotra" (two humans having the same ancestral lineage of a common "clan" - typically the clan being founded by an ancient rishi of millennia-old vintage). A mountaineer who is reported to have summited Everest and his wife have been allegedly boycotted by his community because the wife wears jeans, and does not wear a mangalsutra around her neck or a bindi on her forehead.



Getting such a law passed would not be easy - which is what makes the initiative even more laudable. The intended law was talked about early this year. It has taken much longer than anticipated. Originally, one heard that the law would impose a sentence of seven years' imprisonment while now the prison term is said to be five years. Like with the law against domestic violence, the anti-social-boycott law would come up against deep-seated prejudices inherited across multiple generations.

Besides, merely criminalising undesirable activity would not by itself address the social evil. "A law would not be enough to stop such practices," Fadnavis is reported to have said. "Social awareness is also necessary." Even a debate about the law would ignite introspection in society about how indulging in social boycott is inappropriate. One may laugh this off by arguing that the nationwide outrage against khap panchayats was of no real consequence to the elders who sit in panchayats in Haryana or Tamil Nadu. However, truth be told, the outrage was not without impact. Rome was not built in a day.

The law will also come up against religious extremists of all faiths. It will be argued that the freedom to practice religion includes the freedom of the religious followers to ostracise. Even the European Court of Human Rights bought that argument and refused to interfere when a Church-owned school excommunicated a nonconformist teacher. In 1962, the Supreme Court held the Bombay Prevention of Excommunication Act, 1949 to be unconstitutional. The CM could either skirt religious boycotts to play safe, or take the bull by the horns and risk a constitutional challenge all the way to the Supreme Court. In the process, he would achieve his desire to create greater awareness and introspection that the debate would provoke.

<http://www.mumbaimirror.com/columns/columnists/somasekhar-sundaresan/Boycott-social-boycotting/articleshow/49095662.cms>

Courtesy Mumbai Mirror

• • •

## **Dispensing Justice Through Kangaroo Courts Gaavkis in Maharashtra**

*Anagha Ingole*

In awarding brutal punishment to people who defy social norms based on superstitions, patriarchy and casteism in villages, gaavkis or caste panchayats in Maharashtra openly subvert the law of the land with the tacit support of the police and politicians. The Tanta Mukti Gaav Yojna, a village dispute resolution scheme, initiated by the state government to curb the growing menace of these unconstitutional bodies lacks teeth and perpetuates the established structures of hierarchy and dominance.

As yet another Republic Day goes by, the faltering voice of Pramodini Konde, narrating the death of her three-year old girl child who could not get medical care because her family has been boycotted in a small coastal village in Raigad district of western Maharashtra, raises questions about the extent to which the Constitution has been implemented in the country. Her daughter was the third generation member of an ostracised family from the Koli caste which had been accused of giving up its caste-based occupation by the gaav (village) panchayat.

Her family, like hundreds of other families in western Maharashtra who participated in the Jaat Panchayat Moothmaati Abhiyan (JMA) (Caste Panchayat Eradication Mission), has been wronged by the diktat of the caste panchayat or the “gaavki”, as it is called in the local dialect. The JMA, launched in 2013 by Narendra Dabholkar’s organisation Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (ANS), is a movement to question the parallel authority of these caste panchayats, which advocate conformity to social norms based on superstitions, patriarchy and casteism.

On 8 February 2015, the JMA held a conference at Mahad in collaboration with the Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute (BARTI), where it invited the victimised families from the region to register their complaints, to record their testimonies, to fight for their return to normal village life and to argue for the need of a comprehensive law against these neo-feudal systems of justice dispensation.

This piece tries to give a sense of the nature of oppression that the victims of caste panchayats in Maharashtra go through, the legal and administrative paralysis of the system when it comes to dealing with this issue and finally raises the bigger political question of the limits of radical articulation against caste-based discrimination. It argues that the present village dispute resolution mechanism adopted by the government does nothing to alter status quo, and the caste group/village as a sacred whole must be reformed to create empowered village citizens. This requires rejection of the imagination of a village as an idyllic place with familial bonds between its members and acceptance of the presence and dominance of vested interests—economic and social—articulated by caste panchayats. Finally, one cannot insist enough on the need for a comprehensive law for abolishing jaat panchayats.

### **Nature of Cases**

All cases reported at the conference were of intra-caste panchayats ostracising families for various “crimes”. These alleged crimes can be divided into two sets; those which arise from challenging social norms/collective practices that a caste group must abide by and those that arise from trying to protect one’s economic/material interests and may or may not be given a cloak of defying a social norm. The former range from inter-caste/intra-caste love marriages, women not being able to prove their virginity on being married (where couples have been asked to produce blood stained clothes after their first intercourse), women talking to men and visiting houses of relatives, not observing the required rituals after death of a family member, of taking up work other than caste-based occupations etc. The latter cases range from not allowing passage to a member of the gaavki through one’s private property to not campaigning in an

election for the member of a gaavki and also not contributing to funds collected by the gaavki or paying the fine imposed by it etc.

Dilip, a farmer, narrated that despite the court ruling in his favour regarding his right to not allow the pudharipanch (headman) a passage through his farm, the village turned against him. He had to depend on the neighbouring village for everything he needed, as even the village shopkeeper refused to sell the daily provisions to him for the fear of pollution. The caste panchayats also levy a fine on the persons seen talking or eating with the ostracised. It might also lead to their ostracisation. . The ostracised subject though a part of the village, remains invisible for the villagers. He/she becomes visible only as a subject of ridicule, an outlier, an example of what happens when the authority of the gaavki is challenged. The rules are unwritten, undefined and are recreated or discovered at the will of the gaavki members at every meeting, which in most cases is held in the village temple.

Another case worth mentioning is that of a Sunni Muslim family from Mahabaleshwar, who have been ostracised for mixing with members of the other faiths and for asking the right to offer namaaz at the Minari mosque, which now requires changing over to the Tablighi strain of Islam to offer prayers. The 55-year old head of the family has been denied the right to seek wedding proposals for his daughter from within his village and nine other villages where the jamaat (Islamic Council or assembly) panchayat holds sway. When he sought a proposal from a village outside this circle, the family of the prospective groom was physically restricted from entering the village.

Ugly stories of children inheriting an ostracised childhood, segregated in schools and playgrounds, women being hounded and demanded to prove their virginity at each step etc, abound in these villages dotting the picturesque landscape of western Maharashtra and the small caste-segregated paadas (small group of villages on the hilly terrain). Panchayats for all castes such as Marathas, Kumbhars etc, and for people from different faiths such as Buddhists etc, can be found in these villages under different names. The number of judges or panchpudharis varies between 5 and 12, and the leadership positions circulate within a group of influential families.

### **Tanta Mukti Gaav Yojna: An Inadequate Scheme**

Challenging Gandhi's idyllic conception of a village, Ambedkar called villages cesspools of cruelty, caste prejudice and communalism, with no possibility of a dignified life in the oppressive structures perpetuated by the dominant groups. The stories from these villages seem to prove the accuracy of his analysis, and also point to the central loophole in the government policy adopted to address these issues.

To address the increasing number of disputes arising from villages, the state government adopted the alternative dispute resolution route as advocated by the central government directives post the 2005 Supreme Court verdict in the Salem Advocate Bar Association vs The Union of India case. It announced the Mahatma Gandhi Tanta Mukti Gaav Yojna scheme (TMGY) (MG Dispute Free Village Scheme) (Document in Marathi - <http://www.solapurpolice.gov.in/Tantamukti%20Yojana.pdf>) by a state home department government resolution dated 19 July 2007.

The department later consolidated all the subsequent resolutions on the issue and came out with a comprehensive resolution on 14 August 2008. This resolution laid down both the philosophy and structure of the TMGY. It states that its objective is to establish a samiti (committee) of dispute resolution on the lines of the traditional panchpaddhati—a group of village headmen—resolving disputes through their wisdom. The objective of the committee is to make people reach a compromise in writing. The committee has no enforcement or punitive power. It can only refer the non-compoundable cases to the higher structures of dispute resolution.

There are certain obvious problems with this approach and implementation of the scheme. Firstly, it keeps silent on the disputes arising out of caste-based discrimination and oppression. For example, in a case reported to the JMA, a person was not allowed to enter his own village on the diktat of the gaavki. This is because his younger brother is a caste leader and member of the gaavki. The nature of the dispute registered with the TMGY, however, was classified as a property dispute, as the kind of cases that can be addressed by the TMGY are limited.

Another major problem is that within a village it is the same set of people who constitute the gram panchayat, the TMGY samiti and the gaavki. For the complainant thus, it is a vicious circle where one finds that the offender himself is in a position of authority. The complainants who seek dispute resolution outside the village face intimidation and physical violence accompanied by daily humiliation that comes with a collective social boycott. There are extreme cases such as the one where a 19-year old boy was allegedly beaten to death by people who were sent by the gaavki for accompanying his cousin for a hearing against the absconding gaavki members.

Thirdly, the dispute resolution mechanism does not necessarily involve women. They are neither a necessary constituent of the TMGY committee nor are they involved in resolving cases which involve crime against women.

These parallel structures rule these villages with either the compliance or indifference of the police and almost always with the support of the political class. Even in cases where the police files a case, a comprehensive law against such parallel structures of power remains conspicuous by its absence.

In the wake of the demand for such a law, the state home department released a government order on 30 September 2013, where it laid down that the Indian Penal Code (IPC) Sections 283 to 289, Sections 34, 153 A (Disruption of Social Harmony), 383 (Extortion) and 503 (Criminal Intimidation) to be applied in cases of gaavki kangaroo courts. These sections are clearly not sufficient and do not comprehensively deal with crimes committed by gaavkis. The police themselves often find the present articles insufficient to cover the whole range of crimes perpetrated by gaavkis.

The Indian Constitution which gives all its citizens a right to a life of dignity and right to get justice seem to be non-existent for generations of these villagers, and the administrative responses both at the policy and at the ground level are possessed by the imagination of the village as a family where no punishments but compromises and adjustments can resolve matters. Such an approach makes the victims all the more vulnerable in the absence of any enforcement agency at the village level.

## Conclusions

While speaking at the event, the spokesperson from the ANS themselves identified the central question—why eradicate caste panchayats and not caste? Their analysis is that the resistance against caste panchayats is derived

from the fact that these are parallel structures without legal sanction. Though not incorrect, this analysis is incomplete. Even if one goes on to argue for the abolishment of caste panchayats, the approach of the overburdened state towards the dispute resolution machinery for the villages is limited to the likes of the schemes such as the TMGY. It does not take into account the fact that the TMGY too has to operate within the dominant structures of caste and class prevailing in villages. If it is not necessary that a magistrate looking at cases arising in the city of Mumbai must be from Mumbai, then why should people who have strong interests and stakes in the conventional social relations and maintenance of the hierarchy in a village be given the right to dispense justice under the TMGY.

□

The need of the hour is not just a comprehensive law against caste panchayats but also the recognition of caste and gender-based discrimination that forms the backbone of life in our villages. Firstly, the TMGY cannot be a substitute for caste panchayats. Caste panchayats in themselves must be recognised as a problem—the root of almost all disputes. Secondly, no dispute resolution mechanism that does not take the factors of caste and gender into account can dispense justice. The status quoist philosophy underlying the imagination of justice must be replaced with a reformist one. This will ensure that caste panchayats do not reappear in the form of legal kangaroo courts. Without this, villages in western Maharashtra would continue to suffer the scourge of caste exploitation and patriarchy.

<http://www.epw.in/journal/2015/10/reports-states-web-exclusives/dispensing-justice-through-kangaroo-courts.html>

[recontreanagha@gmail.com](mailto:recontreanagha@gmail.com)

Courtesy: EPW

...

## **Social Boycott of Dalit Scholars: Locating Caste in Modern Context**

*Agnes Amala. T*

While Indians take pride in claiming that the Art (15) of our constitution provides for “Protection for Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of Birth” yet there is very little evidence of its application across the higher education sector.

In fact five research scholars at University of Hyderabad (UoH) belonging to Dalit community were dumbstruck by the decision of the university to restrict their entry into hostels, administration building and other common places in groups and denial of permission to participate in students union elections. As an unjust administrative response to the incidents related to Ambedkar Students Association (ASA) Vs Akhil

Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) on 3rd August 2015. The decision was an outcome of political pressure exerted by BJP Union Minister for Labour, Bandaru Dattatreya and BJP MLC Ramachandra Rao.

The aggrieved students Dontha Prashanth, Rohith Vemula, Vijay Kumar, Seshu Chemudugunta and Sunkanna feel that this decision of suspension by the University's Executive Council without conducting any form of enquiry is no different from the ostracism subjected on the Dalit household in a typical caste dominant Indian village. The career threatening decision of suspension has indeed turned to be a body blow for the five victimized research scholar who claim that it is disheartening to see how their voice, freedom and dignity was completely abrogated in a moment's notice by the people who supposedly exist to guide and protect them during their tenure at the university.

The punishments inflicted upon them include

- 1) Warning letters issued by the office of Registrar with the recommendations of proctorial board
- 2) Suspension of the five students
- 3) Suspension of five students from hostels, barring entry into common places in groups, administrative building and hostels and preventing them from participating in student union election

### **Unfolding of Events:**

On 03.08.2015 Susheel Kumar, President of ABVP-HCU Unit sparked off a massive controversy by referring ASA scholars as "GOONS". His Face Book status read "ASA GOONS are talking about Hooliganism" when demanded an apology for this provoking statement Susheel Kumar tried to evade from controversy by relying that it was an emotional outburst in response to the ABVP VS Ambedkarites confrontation at Delhi university. However on account of his demeaning post he subsequently apologized in writing to the ASA in the presence of security officials.

But the events which unfolded in 4.8.2015 took everyone by surprise. Before one could hardly react, Susheel along with his brother who is a member of Bharathiya Janata Yuva Morcha started to levy heavy allegations on these five victimized scholars that both were beaten up by ASA students led by Dontha Prashanth. The tensions and drama reached its zenith when Ramchanchadran Rao BJP MLC, met then Vice Chancellor R.P. Sharma, who subsequently constituted an Enquiry committee under chairmanship of Prof. Alok Pandey.

The committee, after considering the deposition of security officer Dilip Singh, Krisha Chaitanya and Medical officer Dr. Anupama clearly indicated that the entire incident of the "demeaning of Provoking comment" was settled amicably with the writing of apology letter by Susheel Kumar to the ASA members. Moreover Dr. Anupama's deposition stated that there was no evidence of Susheel Kumar sustaining any injury on account of being beaten up by anyone.

But completely contrary to Prof. Alok Pandey's report, the Proctorial Board of the UoH claimed that :Susheel Kumar was abused, manhandled, beaten and forced to write apology letter by about 30 ASA members and as a result the five most active students Dontha Prashanth, Rohith Vemula, Vijay Kumar, Seshu Chemudugunta and Sunkanna summarily be suspended.

Following this a protest was organized against the injustice meted out to the five ASA members and as a result the then Vice Chancellor R.P. Sharma who after inviting an open discussion with ASA members, saw the fallacies of the enquiry and its decision henceforth immediately revoked the suspension which is subject to constitution of a new committee to enquire into the incidents afresh.

However, the present VC, Prof. Appa Rao Podile without ordering any fresh enquiry took this undemocratic and space-curbing decision of suspension.

This UoH incident could be the perfect preface to the larger version of oppression and it places in comparison to the caste ridden Indian society which has unfortunately penetrated and shed its poison into the most highly esteemed institutions of this country. In Particular reference to exertion of political pressure by BJP, it is not unusual given the way both their muscle, money and political power is used to suppress the voice of Dalits and minorities.

Though one cannot tear down the whole stigma in just a day these courageous students believe that if this incident comes to the larger notice of the society, it could not only shower optimism about the power of one's voice but can also reform, cleanse and make the system accountable and ensure for it's not a "Choice" but a "Right".

Courtesy: Countercurrents.org

•••

## **Maharashtra to be the first state to enact law against social boycott**

*Alok Deshpande*

Maharashtra will be the first state in the country to enact a law against social boycott of individuals or families by caste panchayats. A draft of the said act called as the 'Maharashtra Prohibition of Social Boycott Act, 2015' which was published on the state government's website on Wednesday has termed any action of social boycott as crime.

Maharashtra in recent times has witnessed an increased number of incidents of social boycott and violence at the orders of seniors in the caste panchayats, for not adhering to their rules. Slain rationalist Narendra Dabholkar too had picked up the issue before his murder in Pune. A number of activists and academics have been demanding an act against the foul practices of caste panchayats for years.

This won't be the first time that the state is taking a lead in formulating such acts. Maharashtra was also the first in the country to enact anti superstition law. The act has recommended seven years of imprisonment or fine of Rs. 5 lakh or both if the accused is proven guilty. As per the act, the trial shall be completed within a period of six months from the date of filing of the charge sheet.

The act defines “Caste Panchayat” as a Committee or a body formed by a group of persons belonging to any community, whether registered or not, which functions within the community to regulate various practices in the same community, controls personal and social behaviour of any member and collectively resolves or decides any disputes amongst their members including their families, by issuing oral or written dictums. Any offence punishable under this Act shall be cognizable and bailable and triable by a Metropolitan Magistrate or a Judicial Magistrate of the First Class, as the case may be.

It has also made the provision of ‘Social Boycott Prohibition Officer’ to detect the commission of offences under the provisions of this Act. The officer will also assist magistrate and police officers to discharge their duties.

Krushna Chandgude, one of the prominent anti-caste panchayat activists in Maharashtra expressed pleasure over the government’s action. “It is a positive step from the government and we will be sending our suggestions to the draft. One of the major suggestions would be to make these crimes non-bailable. Hopefully we will succeed in it,” he told *The Hindu*. Advocate Asim Sarode who had submitted his own draft to formulate an act, said that the government’s step is encouraging to activists working in the field

### **Comments:**

1. This law will not serve any purpose and there are many such laws already in place without any means of enforcement in real life.. Caste based Panchayat groups are not identified set of groups or registered entities recognized by the governments.. There are many such non identified groups in many villages which propagates caste based narrow minded backward thinking policies..In such scenarios, there are no means for anyone to go and file cases against caste based discrimination and prove as there wont be any supporting evidence to prove the same and hold some unrecognised group responsible..Our Caste based reservations policy itself is an institutionalized way caste based discrimination.
2. After decades of independence India has not freed herself from shackles of so called untouchability. It is grave situation and present law is testimony to this. This law should be made even harder by making it non-bailable.
3. While intentions are undoubtedly good, it would be interesting to see how this system would work in practice. It will NOT be easy to prosecute an unregistered group of people for 'social' boycott (never mind the contentious definition of social boycott). It could also be seen as intrusion in personal lives of people. State has NO business in dictating whom I choose to be friends with, whom I choose to marry with or which shops I trust and which groups I boycott. What will be even more interesting where does this leave 'Fatwa issuing mosques' and 'Church groups' [registered groups] that at times declare person, group of persons and even certain practices as 'sinful' and ask their followers to boycott such entities!



4. Also if housing societies play foul in letting out flats , selling , buying etc by caste , religion , region , food habits specific it should also be construed as against law of land. This will bring end of discrimination , an unjustified one , bring an atmosphere of cosmopolitan , slowly but surely bring down caste and religious segregation

Courtesy *The Hindu*

• • •

## Opposing Social Boycott

Maharashtra's draft law to curb social boycott is welcome but it needs to be strengthened. The notoriety of the actions of North India's khap panchayats has overshadowed the sizeable number of cases of social boycott ordered by caste panchayats in Maharashtra. Known as the gaavki system, it is a gathering of villagers with long-standing roots and influence in the area. There have been increasing reports of individuals, families, and even caste groups being socially boycotted over acts seen by the larger community as breaking taboos or even misdemeanours under traditional customs.

The Maharashtra government has now drafted the Maharashtra Prohibition of Social Boycott Bill, 2015, that is yet to be introduced in the state legislative assembly. Although there are inadequacies in the draft bill, the general view is that the legislation is very much required. The murdered rationalist Narendra Dabholkar was in the forefront of the demand for such a law. In 2013 the Bombay High Court, while hearing a petition by two victims from Raigad District, directed the state government to draw up a law against such boycotts. It also asked the government to direct police stations across the state to treat such cases as criminal offences.

The draft bill defines a "caste panchayat" as a committee made up of a group of persons belonging to any community, registered or not, which regulates practices in that community, controls personal and social behaviour and collectively resolves the disagreements of and amongst its members through oral or written statements. The offences under the law would be cognisable, bailable and can be sent to trial. A specially appointed social boycott prohibition officer will detect such offences and assist the magistrate and police officers involved in handling such cases. The draft law defines "community" as made up of members connected through religion, caste and sub-caste and a social boycott as a gesture or act, oral or written, of social discrimination. A boycott will cover an act preventing or denying members from conducting or participating in any social, religious, economic or community functions. Any gathering that meets to discuss the imposition of a social boycott will be considered an unlawful assembly. The trial should be completed within six months of the charge sheet being filed.

The draft legislation calls for seven years of imprisonment or a fine of Rs 5 lakh or both if the order of a social boycott is proved. With the victim and court's consent, however, the convicts can be ordered to do community service. The proposed legislation is promising but has its weak points. For instance, it does not look at inter-caste or

inter-religious boycotts. Proving that a non-registered body gave oral orders of boycott would remain difficult. Some activists also want the state to provide protection to the victim and family as soon as a complaint is filed rather than when the trial starts.

The Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan (Anti-superstition) Samiti has presented its own draft of the bill called the Maharashtra Restrictions of Functioning of Jat Panchayat Act 2015 to the government which proposes punitive measures. The samiti argues that the government's proposed legislation is ambiguous and only looks at the limited aspect of social boycott, which is actually an offshoot of more pernicious caste and gender-related discrimination. It also says that heavy fines are imposed by these bodies on poor victims.

Media reports of cases in Maharashtra show that social boycott actions can follow couples marrying within the gotra and marrying outside the caste, married women not wearing the mangalsutra, women wearing jeans or "gowns," and even parents not allowing their children to participate in Holi revelry. These boycotts deny access to livelihoods apart from prohibiting personal interactions among friends and even family. The trajectories of a number of social welfare and "progressive" legislations have shown that while the law certainly can put in place punitive measures to protect citizens, deep-rooted social practices cannot be curtailed or eliminated. Maharashtra also enacted the Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and Other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013, but its progress from draft to law was tortuously delayed, and the provisions considerably diluted in order to accommodate a number of political and religious apprehensions. The anti-social boycott bill will not hopefully traverse the same path.

Courtesy: EPW

...

## Cabinet approves bill against social boycott

Any person found guilty of practising social boycott of people or their family members will be imprisoned for three years or fined Rs 1 lakh. In some cases both punishments may apply.

Moreover, the victims of ostracism will be able to claim a payout. The draft Act also allows for an out-of-court settlement between the complainant and the accused.

The Maharashtra cabinet on Tuesday approved the Prohibition of Social Boycott Bill, which will be tabled in the forthcoming Budget session of the state legislature. The session will commence on March 9. Chief minister Devendra Fadnavis tweeted on the draft legislation.

The bill aims to root out outdated and unconstitutional practices of caste panchayats.

But all this may have been too late for Mount Everest climber, Rahul Yelange (31), and his advocate wife Pournima Yelange, who had faced social harassment in their own village in Raigad district. The two are now settled in Dubai.

In January 2015, TOI had reported how the Yelanges had faced a difficult time when they had moved back to their village in Raigad district to do dairy farming and promote adventure sports. Pournima was taunted by the villagers for wearing jeans and not wearing a mangalsutra despite being married.

The members of the local gram panchayat had termed it a "petty" issue, which would be resolved. But matters turned worse some days after the media reported about the social boycott of the Yelanges. Their cowshed mysteriously caught fire and many farm animals were injured due to burns.

The couple had lodged a police complaint about the fire and then moved to Pune. Talking to TOI on Tuesday, mountaineer Umesh Zirpe said: "Rahul was in my team during India's first civilian expedition to Mount Everest in May 2012. Last year, we too had heard about the social problems faced by the couple. However, now they are settled in Dubai."

Anarjit Chauhan, an RTI activist from Navi Mumbai, said, "It is a good move by the state government to stop anti-social traditions. However, such laws should not just remain on paper these should be properly implemented."

The issue of social boycott was raised in the House in the last Budget session.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/Cabinet-approves-bill-against-social-boycott/articleshow/51213541.cms>

Courtesy: Times of India

● ● ●

An Official Journal of **Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee, India**

# THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build Rationalist Society

Issue - 2



Vol - 16

**Jul – Sept 2016**

## *In this issue...*

2	Scientific Temper	Narendra Dabholkar
9	Breaking the Barriers	Prabhakar Nanawaty
11	Role of Atheist and Rationalist Literature in Social Change	G. Vijayam
14	Karnataka dithers over law against superstition	Johnson T.A.
16	Karnataka bows to mutts, dilutes superstition bill	Sandeep Moudgal
17	Like Ambedkar, Rohith had no nation	Anshul Trivedi
20	The Idea of India	Ram Puniyani
22	Unholy Nexus:	Megha Pansare
24	"I share bond with every writer..."	Pradnya Daya Pawar
32	While Propagating Rationalism	Datta Desai
34	Be an Enlightened Hindu	Keshav Shet Revankar

**Founder**  
**Dr. Narendra Dabholkar**  
**(1945-2013)**

**Editors:**  
**P.K. Nanawaty**  
**Ms Suman Oak**

[pkn.ans@gmail.com](mailto:pkn.ans@gmail.com)

[www.thoughtnaction.co.in](http://www.thoughtnaction.co.in)

## Scientific Temper

*Narendra Dabholkar (1945-2013)*

Science is progressing at breakneck speed. The notion that man can understand the rules of nature and use them for his own benefit is a recent one in history, and we are seeing the stunning results of this notion. On the one hand, science informs us of the structure of subatomic particles; on the other, it shows us the wonder of supernovae in the sky. There is no doubt that massive airplanes, orbiting satellites, the radio and television beaming the whole world into our rooms, and global communications technology have made the world a very small place. The study of single-celled organisms has helped medicine progress leaps and bounds. High yield variety seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and modern farming techniques have, for the first time, brought hunger into the realm of humanly solvable problems. Communications and information technology are growing daily and at mind-numbing speeds.

It is imperative that students in our society receive an excellent education in science. Not only will this make our future scientists, technicians and skilled workers better, but it will also help inculcate faith in science among the people. More capable scientists and technicians will aid in our industrial, agricultural, medical and overall economic growth. We believed that because of this growth and of the people's participation in this growth, many harmful traditional rituals would see their last days, and there would not be any need for a separate anti-superstition movement. In reality, there are several people who, despite living in a world of scientific achievement, stay miles away from cultivating a scientific temper. Indeed, they are proud of doing so. I see them follow superstitions in their own way, everywhere, regardless of religion, caste and class: from the tribal in his forest to the industrialist making international deals from his Mumbai high-rise; from the just maturing seven year old to the mature seventy year old. And I am left wondering if there is something wrong with the way we define progress.

People make promises to god; they become indebted and sacrifice animals to fulfill those promises. They waste many an hour at the crematorium, waiting for a crow to signal the freedom of a loved one's soul. They consult tantriks and charlatans, suspecting the hand of the devil in psychological problems. They see signs everywhere: falling stones, clothes catching fire, glass breaking. They attempt to speak through the dead through séances. They take important decisions based on lifeless horoscopes, attributing actions to destiny. They perform *yajnas*, toss good food into fire, for everything, from the birth of a son to the welfare of the world. They disapprove of widow remarriage for reasons of caste. Even some gynecologists consider themselves impure while menstruating. Governors call for *pujas* when the rains are scarce and Presidents and Prime Ministers pay their respects to a fraud godman whose skills extended to the trick of pulling objects out of thin air, but not to preventing his own helper's murder. Which century are we living in? What does this defeat of the age of science tell us? Why did it transpire, why is it still happening?

People fall prey to superstition because they need constant support. It is natural that they will turn to the deceptive but attractive aid of superstition for momentary relief from their agitation, exploitation and

instability. It is logical to argue that when situations change and the need for support ceases to exist, the belief in superstition will also be eradicated, but the reality is different. It is true that superstition is a crutch in tough times, but we also turn to superstition to fulfill our greed, and this makes it a never-ending phenomenon. Hubris blinds people not only to the actual possibility of them acquiring what they want, but also the futility of the blessings of godmen, the rings of kings, the tantrik's *mantras*, auspicious times and *yajnas*. This is because the scientific realisation that there is not even an iota of validity in any of these solutions has never formed in most people's minds. On the contrary, a mindset of "There must be something to it that I don't understand" is created. Indeed, it is nurtured. The history of all scientific discoveries is that of attempting to understand what we previously couldn't.

Early man watched nature, astounded. He was incapable of understanding the roaring thunder, the blinding lightning, pouring rain, vicious forest fires and devastating storms. It looked simple – these were formidable powers, and people's well-being appeared to depend on pleasing them. This is why the "five elements" were given so much importance. Battling with these elements, in a sense man was the weakest creature on earth. He lived in caves and ate raw meat. He could neither fly like the sparrow nor survive underwater like the fish. Nature had not equipped him to run like the deer or attack like an antelope. He had neither the strength of the rhinoceros nor the tusks of the elephant. He lacked the sharp teeth and claws of the lion and the tiger. There was no fur coat to protect him from the biting cold nor did he have the ability to leap from tree to tree. Despite all this, seemingly weak man became the de facto ruler of the world – how?

Knowledge is exclusive to humans. Other organisms made adjusted to nature; man lords over it. This progress was made over thousands of generations. The human brain developed along with our ability to grab things with our hands thanks to our opposable thumbs and to make tools. Humans created language, nurtured it, made it grow. An evolved larynx and oral cavity are peculiar to man. Not only did man acquire knowledge, he also transferred it through language. The use of his hands and tools, the development of language and of reason propelled man towards breathtaking progress.

Science is the practice of knowledge, the ceaseless search for knowledge. The word "science" has been derived from the Latin *scientia*, derived from *scire*, which means "to know". The pure love for knowledge is the propeller for science, and it was born through unending curiosity about the universe. Man has always been, and is, curious about the many happenings in the world. Why are the seas and sky blue? Where do butterflies get their colours from? What causes high and low tides? How many stars can we count with the naked eye? Why does the sun appear larger during sunrise and sunset? Why do fireflies glow at night? Why do mosquitoes hum? What is stainless steel, plastic? Man is faced with thousands of questions in the quest to quell his curiosity through knowledge. Quelling this curiosity satisfies man, makes him happy. The pursuit of happiness, of course, comes naturally to man.

The origin of scientific thinking and practice can be found in human intelligence and intergenerational transferred knowledge. Practical know-how and skills are transferred from one generation to the next as civilisation grows. For nearly one lakh years after his origin on earth, man was but uncivilised. He lived in caves, gathered and hunted for food, and clothed himself in hide and bark.

Agriculture and with it, a stable life in one place began around 8,000 years ago. Man began making clothes from cotton and wool. He made houses from stone. He started using iron, wood and clay. Gradually he started using fire to cook food and logs to float on the water. Primeval ideas about the world and about unknown powers governing the working of the world also began at this time. Employing the use of logic to attempt to pin down the causes of natural phenomena happened mainly through technology at this time, and the tendency to use experiences and observations happened mainly in artisanship. There were, however, sporadic attempts to bring the two together.

Man's reasoning was wrong too, several times. He beat the drum during eclipses, expecting the sound to chase away the demon come to swallow the sun like it chased away the animals. Thunder was much louder than his stone mill, so he reasoned that someone in the sky was grinding grain in a very large stone mill. Lightning looked like the crack of a charioteer's whip; naturally he reasoned that lightning signaled that Indra's chariot was traversing the skies. When sudden madness gripped someone he knew to be sane before, he found it reasonable to assume that a demonic power had taken control of that person. Mistakes are always made in the pursuit of any kind of knowledge; these were no different. Indeed, they are inevitable for the attainment of perfection. It was difficult for man to see or reason differently with the extremely limited information at his disposal.

The store of knowledge grew due to curiosity and necessity. Man started studying the celestial bodies to create a calendar for farming. In Egypt, the flooding of the Nile inundated the fields and made them fertile. Some people noticed that when particular stars shone in a particular part of the sky, the Nile would flood, and this proved to be helpful in planning the agricultural calendar. The origin of botany lies in the search for medicines. The study of chemistry developed with the interest in alchemy.

In India in the third and fourth century AD, the famous chemist Nagarjun's works *Rasaratnakar* and *Kalkaputatannam* were popular. These described the compounds (and the uses of these compounds) that could be created from sulphur, mercury, copper, silver and gold. Interestingly, these books also contain descriptions of magic and miracles. The famous astronomer Varahamihira also lived during this time. His book *Bruhat Samhita* contains information about the sun and the planets. In the same period, the lexicographer Amar Singh has observed the habits, characteristics and reproductive patterns of various species of plants and animals and has attempted to classify them. The discovery of zero was made in India. The works of Aryabhatta and Bhaskaracharya are rich with important theories in mathematics and astronomy. However, from the eight century onwards, the tendency to think the guru's teachings were the truth increased and the tendency to acquire knowledge decreased.

All of this is man's doing before the advent of modern science. The use of modern scientific techniques including observation, logical thinking and experimentation faced two main hurdles. First, skilled and hardworking artisans lacked the training and hence ability for formal logical thought. Second, man's understanding of natural phenomena was shaky at best, and was often muddled by preconceived notions. The core of science is objective reasoning. Before the 15<sup>th</sup> century, science was dependent on opinions that were shared by royalty and religion. This not only stemmed scientific progress but also created several misconceptions about nature in society, for instance the notion that the earth is at the centre of the universe. Or, that god created man. "Science" in those days supported the idea that the

sun and the moon were created to make lit days and cool nights available to man. Science was pushed to corroborate the teachings of the church and the Bible on the one hand and the church-approved works of Aristotle on the other. This led to a lot of intellectual gymnastics within the discipline. Aristotle talks about the final cause and efficient cause of every action, the final cause being the intention. In many ways the final cause of analysis in science in those times was the desire to align with the views of the church.

It is believed that scientific temper as we know it today began in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, the scientific method is but a part of it. Its core is in fearlessly challenging the establishment thought at the peril of one's life. It started before 399 AD, when Socrates was prosecuted in Athens. He was accused of not believing in the god the whole country believed in, and leading the youth away from traditional values. It was not that Socrates did not believe in God, but he believed that no one ought to accept any principle, even the existence of God, without subjecting it to reason. He taught his disciples that knowledge was the greatest virtue and the lack of knowledge the greatest vice. The existence of God or divine powers was not necessary for the carrying out of governance. He argued that laws and policies ought to be made based on historical and sociological experience. It was inevitable that faith in the existing laws would dwindle after they were subjected to reason. Fundamentalists found this hypocritical. Socrates was dragged to court and was sentenced to death through poisoning. In societies where people have stood up against their kith and kin and against society to defend their ideas born through reason, the reach of superstitions has reduced and the doors of scientific progress have opened. Socrates started the tradition of courting death for one's views. This tradition disappeared for a few centuries and with it, Europe's progress, too, stalled. World history shows us that the more individuals are allowed to think, reason and acquire knowledge freely, the more society progresses. When independent thinking and research dies, society goes through a dark age. This is what transpired in Europe from the fourth century to the seventh.

The willingness to die for reason and scientific temper began in Europe 700 years ago: with it came the dawn of the Renaissance. That struggle, however, was morbid and short-lived. Roger Bacon (1214-1294) pledged when he was but a student, that he would not die before he had and experimented on Aristotle's sayings and theories. He preached that the truth could not be found in the holy books or through superstition, but only through the use of intelligence, experience, deliberation and experimentation. Since he was a friar in the Franciscan order, the members of his order did not put him to death but sentenced him to house arrest. The man who wanted to enlighten the world with knowledge spent the rest of his life in darkness. In India, after the Charvakas and the Buddha, and in the two thousand years before Western thought made its way here, the clarion call "Will you think?", putting the caller at risk of his life for encouraging the populace to think, was not raised. Skills and knowledge transferred through tradition started drying up and no one mourned them. Whose house is it proper to dine at? When is it appropriate to eat onions? Should vermilion paste be applied horizontally or vertically? How many loops of the holy thread must we make? Does good fortune come from being touched by a cow's tail or does the soul find peace by drinking cow urine? These were the important questions of debate. In this convoluted discussion, this meaningless exercise, this futile tradition, this exploitative religion, the common man was left motionless. We could only boast of some superhuman kings and a few texts on philosophy during this period. During the same time, Galileo's telescope and the theories and discoveries that resulted from it took Europe by storm.



Galileo provided a strong confirmation for Copernicus's views. He brought the assertions of the holy books into question. He was examining Aristotle's assertions. The invention of the telescope was a disruption. Copernicus knew that to prove his theory of a heliocentric universe, he would have to prove that Venus had phases like the moon. His inability to prove this had pitted the scientific world against him. Galileo proved this through his telescope, and also that the moon had hills and the sun had spots. People found these revelations shocking and the religious leaders were terrified. To accept Galileo's revelations would mean to accept flaws in the work of the Creator. Teachers in catholic institutions of learning were forbidden from mentioning the spots on the sun. This ban was in force in some universities for many centuries. The clergy were pressurised to excommunicate mathematicians because it was thought that geometry was the devil's science and mathematicians were heretics. A committee of theologians discussed the subject of astronomy and deduced two conclusions from certain passages in the Bible.

"The notion that the sun is stationary and does not revolve around the earth is absolutely wrong and openly challenges the Holy Scripture. The notion that the earth revolves around the sun is preposterous and contrary to the religious view."

Then the Pope ordered Galileo to depose before the Roman Catholic Inquisition. The Inquisition ordered him to renounce his assertions. On the twenty third of February, 1616, Galileo pledged in writing and verbally to not support the Copernican view of the universe, and was granted freedom. This incident happened nearly 16 years after Bruno was burnt alive.

After this, all books that proclaimed that the earth moved in the skies were banned.

And yet, Galileo was hopeful. In 1623, his friend Cardinal Barberini became the Pope and was called Pope Urban VIII. Feeling slightly more secure, Galileo started writing a book called Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems. The book technically did not side with either Ptolemy's or Copernicus's view, but the way it was written provided passionate endorsement to Copernicus's view. This exquisite book was read widely and enthusiastically all over Europe.

The religious leaders were agitated once again. Galileo was silenced heavily. "The idea of a mobile earth is foolish, absurd and condemnable. That the earth is stationary is a holy notion. Conjectures about the immortality of the soul, the existence of God and his image in man may be forgivable, but proposing that the earth revolves around the sun is not forgivable." Such were the allegations and opinions against Galileo.

He was again ordered to stand before the Inquisition. He pleaded that he could not travel from Florence to Rome owing to illness but this was not accepted. His friend the Pope threatened to send his own doctor and to bring him to Rome in chains if his illness was found to be not serious. Galileo then made his way to Rome on his own. He was told that if he confessed to his crimes and repented, he would be subjected to imprisonment at the pleasure of the Inquisition, and would be asked to repeat a certain prayer about repentance every week for the next three years.

Because this softer punishment would only be meted out if he confessed, Galileo fell to his knees in front of the Inquisition and repeated what they wanted him to say. "I renounce these mistakes and incorrect views. I believe they are abhorrent and pledge that I will write or speak nothing that may hold me suspect of heresy. If I find any heretic declaring that the earth moves, I will condemn him in front of

the Inquisition.” He pledged the renunciation of his views by the Bible. Later, the generous Inquisition commuted his sentence from formal imprisonment to house arrest. All his movements were restricted. He was not permitted to meet his family and friends. He went blind in 1617 and passed away in 1642.

Eventually, however, the era of science dawned. The scientific method came to be known as the only effective and appropriate way to acquire knowledge. No one claims that it solves all problems swiftly. Nevertheless, the scientific method helps us pinpoint causation, formulate questions, keep the process of answering questions on the right track and maximises the possibility of finding the answers tomorrow that we did not find today, while staying on the same track.

Today, it is as if teaching science, using technology and having scientific thinking are mutually exclusive. Even people with degrees in scientific fields exhibit this characteristic, and some people even use their knowledge of science to spread unscientific thinking.

Thinking logically about naturally phenomena, and appending experience and experimentation to this thinking, began in the thirteenth century. Scientists have always aimed to control factors in order to create accurate experiments. Science is born through the use of an exact process assisted by observation and logic. Some people call science “specialised knowledge” but knowledge itself is defined as information acquired through logically sound means and conclusions derived from such information. In science, reasoning and experimentation are interdependent: reason is subjected to the test of experimentation and then firm conclusions are drawn, laws are derived.

There are many different ways of looking at the questions of the universe, its creation, growth, and the position of human beings in the universe. They can be classified into those that are based on what is and can be known, and those that are not. Scientific thinking falls under the former category. Materialism and worldliness are philosophies propounded on this basis. On the other hand, spiritualism, godliness and divinity are philosophies derived from the latter category. Social norms and teaching methods today are also under the influence of this category.

To improve one’s ability to make sense of what is experienced is building scientific temper and dispelling superstition. Making sense of experience does not mean understanding experience totally, but untangling our usually muddled and intertwined experiences to understand their essence. For instance, if we throw a stone and a feather from a height, the stone falls faster than the feather. However, if we remove the wind from the equation, both will fall at the same pace. The exceptional talent to understand this is present in very few people. But the knowledge that is limited to talented people today becomes common knowledge tomorrow. This is the value of scientific thinking.

Digging into our vast experience and making sense of it, representing those insights mathematically, and using these formulae to acquire new knowledge are skills unique to humans. With the help of these tools, knowledge spreads everywhere. Acquiring knowledge, and more so transferring knowledge, is a human specialty. Scientific temper is of fundamental importance to this acquisition and transfer of knowledge.

The Parliament of India passed the Scientific Policy Resolution in March 1958, a document inspired by the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. These were the important parts – “It is only through the scientific approach and method and the use of scientific knowledge that amenities can be provided to

every member of the community...Science has led to the growth and diffusion of culture to an extent never possible before...it has provided new tools of thought and has extended man's mental horizon. It has thus influenced even the basic values of life, and has given to society and new vitality and a new dynamism."

In 1975, an Indira Gandhi-led Parliament amended the Constitution to add Fundamental Duties of Indian citizens. "To develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform" is now a fundamental duty. In 1987, Rajiv Gandhi's education policy emphasised greatly on the development of scientific temper.

However, it is important to be constantly aware that science is not magic. To say that all questions will be solved by science is to replace God with science. It is only the people who can solve problems. Scientific thinking shows us the appropriate way to solve them. Apart from this, making science popular and inculcating scientific temper are separate challenges and we must remember this. For instance, it is beneficial to increase the use of solar energy in our daily lives, but it is inimical to scientific temper to inaugurate the equipment used for solar energy with a lemon or by cracking open a coconut. However, making science popular can be a way to inculcate scientific temper. When inventions affect our surroundings, they help to improve the understanding of science and indirectly to inculcate scientific temper.

The method science uses to imbibe knowledge is scientific temper. A specific method of acquiring knowledge historically developed along with the development of science. Religious faith might be an inherent and strong characteristic of man, but so is critical thinking. People use critical thinking all the time while making business decisions. Businesses fail if all factors are not considered carefully. Scientific thinking is this same careful consideration but it is not used while making business decisions. It is used to understand what an incident means, what the different elements in nature are, what the rules governing various phenomena are, etc. Naturally, these rules are not discernible simply by observing elements and phenomena as they are. It takes a superior level of imagination and intelligence to discern these rules. When a talented scientist proposes her theory, she provides the proof on which it is based and the logical reasoning from which the theory takes shape. To disprove that theory, one has to show that either the proof or the reasoning is faulty. Else the theory is accepted as true. This is why religious faith begins to support and converge with established scientific theories. When scientific thinking and knowledge gained ground in Europe, religion did not destabilise or become irrelevant. The religious and scientific worlds converged as religion moved closer to science. Elements and phenomena observable by man, and the rules governing them, are in the domain of science. There lies no scope for religion there.

(From His Marathi book *Vichar Tari Karaal*)

*Translated by Jai Vipra*



## Breaking the Barriers

### 25 years of Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Vartapatra (ANV)

*Prabhakar Nanawaty*

Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Vartapatra (ANV) is not just a house journal trumpeting the achievements and programs of Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti, a movement lead by Late Dr Narendra Dabholkar in Maharashtra. ANV is also a need we feel within us, of a desire to know and/or act in the path of rational thinking.

Twenty five years ago it was just 2-4 pages in the name 'Kavadase' published from an activist's flat at Panvel. There was no proper office and there were no facilities to print and post. Sometimes it has to be cyclostyled. Activists delivered the copies by hand to save the cost of postage. However the content was rich and quite appealing. Today ANV has its own office facilities to publish 36 page monthly magazine with four colour cover page. Not even a single issue had been missed for last 25 years. In addition to the 36 page magazine, there is a special issue of 300+ pages published every year. A rough statistics shows that there are 1000 + articles printed on 9000 pages and written by 500 authors.

It seems ANV has come a very long way since; eradication of superstition is no longer a subject of gossip or entertainment, but survival issue for downtrodden and gullible. If one can scan through the pages of ANV, he/she will certainly feel as though time has stood stand still or video cassette is being played again and again. Godmen are still thriving; quacks are in greater demand; astrologers are still fooling the people; claims of miracle are being entertained by the public. In fact, ANV covers subjects like witchcraft, poltergeist, haunted houses, miracle exposures, harmful practices followed in religion etc. ANV supported the campaigns like pollution free festivals like Ganeshotsava, Holi and Diwali. A series of articles were written against immersion of Ganesh idols made of Plaster of Paris (POP) which were polluting the flowing river and water bodies. ANV published the articles on noise polluting crackers and insisted that the crackers should not be used to celebrate Diwali. ANV advocated that instead of burning the sweet pancakes in the Holi fire, it is better to distribute the same to poor people. There is a huge readership supporting the views of ANV.

ANV had published the articles exposing Satya Saibaba, Narendra Maharaj, Nirmal Baba, Radhe Maa, Mata Amritanandmayee, Asaram Bapu, and many self published 'saints', detailing how these godmen and women are fooling people in the name of God, religion, claiming supernatural powers, so called their 'spiritual philosophy,' etc. ANV regularly publishes critical articles on religious practices and suggest the followers to take stock of the practices vis-à-vis what religions are preaching. One may find many articles written by eminent scholars about religion, spiritualism, existence of God, fallacy of rebirth, Moksha etc. These articles make readers to think critically about these concepts.

In addition to critical articles on religion, ANV also publishes articles on social and environmental issues too. The articles criticize the pseudoscience, malpractices in medical treatment, hypnotism as therapy, food habits, etc. ANV published a series of articles on so called value based education and exposed

hidden agenda of the concerned to impose age old, religious rituals and practices on students which may lead to belief in superstitions. ANV also dealt with 'New Age' belief systems like Vaastushastra, Feng Shui, many facets of astrology, and explained the marketing practices behind such foolhardy issues. The magazine takes the issues of money making Ponzy schemes and cautions the readers not to fall pray to such fraudulent schemes. In fact globalization has brought many superstitions of the world and people are falling prey to them. ANV has accepted the challenges and is continuing its crusade against prevailing superstitions and other issues too.

While going through the pages of issues of last 25 years, it gives a complete picture about the stages in which Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti went through, its multifarious activities, its insistence to pass the bill against superstitions, and the acceptance of the issues raised by ANS. The magazine gives full publicity to conventions, conferences, workshops, meetings, etc undertaken by ANS. Generally during these conventions eminent progressive thinkers are invited to express their views. Their speeches are a sort of food for thought to readers of ANV. ANV publishes full transcript of the speeches delivered.

Late Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, the founder of ANS, was a great contributor to this magazine. He used to work round the clock for ANS. In spite of his busy schedule he will find some time and write and/or dictate articles, columns, reply to the readers' letters explaining various aspects of the issues, campaigns ANS was undertaking. He wrote detailed articles *on faith and superstitions, scientific outlook, Mind, mental illness, haunting and possessing, Broad Ideological Stand of Eradication of Superstition, Eradication of Superstition and the Concept of God, Women and Eradication of Superstition, Ethics and Eradication of Superstition, Miracle exposure: an opportunity to ANS, Shani Shinganapur, Sheshrao Maharaj, Theoretical stand for confronting Godmen, Law against inhuman practices*, etc. which were mind captivating to readers. He wrote a series of articles on passing the Bill on inhuman practices. The articles covered almost all aspects of the law, the struggles he and ANS faced, confrontations with bureaucracy, and elected representatives who were supposed to pass the bill, etc. His writing style was very simple and quite appealing to readers. It used to be a heart to heart dialogue between him and readers. Till his gruesome death on 20 Aug 2013, he contributed his writings to ANV. In fact ANV published special issues which contained obituaries published in various magazines and newspapers and reminiscences by the activists.

Though the title of the magazine may suggest that its business is just to deal with superstitions and describe the efforts put up by ANS activists in this regard. No doubt ANV is reporting about these exposures so as to convince the readers not to be a victim to these superstitions. But ANV has a large share of articles about other burning issues of the society. One may find the articles on environmental issues, blood donation, eye donation, health and hygiene, nutrition, addictions, ill effect of cosmetics, etc. Most of the articles published in this magazine are quite informative. Some of the articles take critical view about the rituals, traditions, celebrations, caste, religions, and the idea of God, outdated religious values and customs, etc. ANV also published the articles on religious places like Shirdi, Tirupati, Ajmer, Mt Abu etc so that readers will know what exactly is happening in these places and expose their marketing tactics.

As a part of silver jubilee celebrations ANV arranged a literary meet and had discussion on *Role of Rationalist Literature in Social Change* and invited quite a few editors and activists from all over India. It was heartening to note that in spite of hurdles and hardships, the progressive movement is achieving success in various nooks and corners of the country.

ANV has a very long way to go to achieve its goal of building a rational society. ANV has to work even harder to break the barriers of miracle-mongering and superstitious society and confront the exploiters and protect the gullible. Readers are the only judges who will evaluate the efforts of ANV and guide the magazine to bring rationality in the public domain, ... soon and very soon!.

[pkn.ans@gamil.com](mailto:pkn.ans@gamil.com)

■■■

## Role of Atheist and Rationalist Literature in Social Change

G. Vijayam

*“... There were 113,11,50,000 nonreligious people in the world in 2010, and that number is expected to increase to 123,03,40,000 by the year 2020.”*

*Free Inquiry*

Atheist Centre is immensely happy that Maharashtra Andhshraddha Nirmoolan Samitee is organizing the Second Andh Shraddha Nirmulan Sahitya Sammelan on May 14-15, 2016 at Sangli, Maharashtra. We heartily congratulate you for the noble endeavour to create awareness among people to fight superstitions and blind beliefs that retard the onward march of society. Taking inspiration from Shahid Dr. Narendra Dobholkar you embarked on empowering the youth, women and the oppressed and suppressed people through this literary festival.

For centuries religions appropriated the powerful tool of literature to turn the attention of the people to imaginary god and other-world after death of the person. Hence, literature could address the stark realities of poverty, inequalities and injustice and oppression in society and the nations. As literature had become the handmaid of religion and used art, architecture and other forms of fine arts to sing the glory of god and to perpetuate superstitions. In the Middle Ages the Western countries were in the Dark Ages, as religion was all pervasive and Christianity turned people's attention to non-existing and imaginary other world. That is why the historians dubbed Middle Age as the Dark Age. Till the advent of the Renaissance and Reformation, Europe and the West remained in the Dark ages.

The Renaissance and Reformation brought a sea change and opened up a new vista. Martin Luther challenged the supremacy of the Pope and the Catholic religion. Luther heralded a new era by stating that “Work is worship.” For centuries religion taught to people that “worship is work.” Martin Luther brought tremendous awakening among people by challenging the Sale of indulgences (*pap parihara patra*) to the Princes and the rich people. The poor and the downtrodden remained as the wretched of the earth.

In the conflict between science and religion, Galileo wrote science books in his mother tongue, Italian. It was a radical departure from writing books in Latin, like in Sanskrit in India. When people started writing in the local languages that literature came much closer to the common people. People realized through literature that “Man is the measure of the measure of all things.” Then, in the modern age Science developed with leaps and bounds. It was a revolutionary step. The conflict between Science and religion is too well known to elaborate further. Finally, Science became supreme. Not only science, but also Scientific and secular outlook changed the course of human history.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries there was yawning for democracy. This resulted in the American and the French Revolutions. Thus literature played a major role in awakening people for their liberation. Thomas Paine, who declared himself a Universal citizen, accelerated the pace of American Revolution in a decisive manner by the literature he had produced. His books “*The Crisis*” and the “*Common Sense*” are memorable. He also wrote a book, *the “Age of Reason”*. Thus, a series of revolutions enabled people to question the established order. Liberty, equality, fraternity and justice led to creating new consciousness among the people. In spite of several restrictions, democracy and Constitutionalism was a battle cry for liberation. The Russian Revolution became a ray of hope for the onward march society. The industrialization, urbanization, colonization, and Imperialism made the socio-economic exploitation crystal clear and in Europe people were people restless.

### **Literature in common people's language**

In India, Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent struggles revealed the strength of common people. The advent of the Indian Independence was a beacon light for people in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In awakening people, literature played a crucial role. Gandhi was well aware of the significance of publication of journals, hence he edited journals such as *Indian Opinion* in South Africa, *Navajivan* and *Harijan* after coming to India. For writing three articles in his journals like “Puzzle and its solution”, “Shaking the Manes” Gandhi was charged with sedition and he was sentenced for six years. Thus for Gandhi literature had become a powerful instrument of social change in the freedom struggle. Literature proved to be the voice to the voiceless.

Even in the height of the freedom struggle, the circulation of his journals was comparatively low as all other daily newspapers in the nook and corner of the country published Gandhi's views on various issues day in and day out. Gandhi was not a journalist. He was a publicist, championing freedom and liberation of people from mental slavery. When literature was published in the common people's languages and not in *Granthik*, the literature became the vehicle of social change.

What is true of Gandhi's journals, it is equally applicable to all progressive minded journals, including atheist, rationalist and humanist journals and the literature. The aim is not commercial or making profit, but to awaken common people and make them realize the power inherent in them. Gandhi made people fearless which heralded societal change.

### **Democracy and questioning spirit**

The periodic elections, however faulty they are, became weapons in the hands of people in making and unmaking the Governments through their franchise. It was beginning of a qualitative change.

From times immemorial, some people challenged the authority of religion and the control of religious people. They were persecuted. Their books were burnt. People like Giordano Bruno were burnt alive for stating the sun is also a star.

The advocates of social change were known as social reformers. They promoted rational thinking, humanist outlook and atheist approach. They championed equality all humans. They opposed the rigours of the caste system and opposed the heinous practice of untouchability and atrocities on women. The central theme of literature shifted from singing the glory of god to empowering people to challenging the inhuman customs and traditions.

India is a subcontinent with various states and provinces and many of writings in the local languages are not still available to people. Much of the valuable literature is lost in the struggles. The caste distinctions, internal feuds and lack of the sense of preservation of the literature, and natural and social calamities were some of the causes for the destruction of the unconventional literature.

In recent centuries, atheists, rationalists and humanists and freethinkers were known as social reformers. B. S. Savarkar, Kabir, Vemana, Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Mahatma Phule, Eswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Kandukuri Veeresalingam, Agarkar, Narayana Guru, Sahodaran Ayyappan, and Periyar E. V. Ramaswami, Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Prof. H. Narasimhaiah, Dr. Abraham T. Koor, Premanand, M. N. Roy, Gora, Saraswathi Gora, Dr. Indumati Parikh, Malladi Subbamma and innumerable other social reformers fought against superstitions, outmoded customs such as sati, child-marriages and the belief in devils and demons, exploitation of women and girl children, and many other social evils. The orthodox sections of society and the vested interests opposed these reformers vehemently.

In the Western society there is tradition of writing their views and publishing in the journals or books. The economic position in the West enables the literature for the posterity. But the economic and social situation in India and other developing countries is quite different, due to paucity of resources and commitment. Superstitions and blind beliefs still rule the roost.

Only recently, the universities in India and some publishers are coming forward to publish on outstanding atheists, rationalists and social reformers. We are happy that Johannes Quack, a German Scholar did research on Maharashtra Andh Shraddha Nirmoolan Samiti and the Oxford University Press published the thesis in 2012 entitled *“Disenchanted India”* – with a subtitle: *“Organized Rationalism and Criticism of religion in India.”* Prof. Sunanda Shet, did her doctoral work on “Gora – His life and work” and it was published by B. Premanand in 2000. Gora’s writings on atheism and social progress have been translated into some Indian languages.

### **Gora – an atheist social revolutionary who propounded positive atheism**

For centuries Atheism suffered persecution in the hands of the religious fanatics. Every effort was made for thought control and suppression of the truth which challenged the existence of god. In the West, the Inquisition and Index of books oppressed and suppressed free development of the personality of individuals. Even the development of science was opposed by religion. However, in spite of the persecution science flowered and benefited the human kind.



Similarly, every effort was made to contain and control the freedom of the individual with regard to dissent about god. The books written by atheists and free thinkers were burnt. The writings of Charvakas and Lokayatas were completely lost, because of the religious intolerance.

In the West, the persecution continued even in the universities. In India, there was relative freedom for dissent. But, in India, the structural violence acted as a deterrence and invisible hand and the atheists and freethinkers suffered social boycott and benign neglect. In spite of the persecution some people boldly defied the religious taboos and braved the social stigma. Some of the social reformers like, Ishwara Chandra Vidya Sagar were agnosts. Some others used the traditional jargon of religion but tried to reinterpret the scriptures in a liberal way. In the modern period, the revolutions in religion and the spread of science and technology reduced the rigour of persecution to some extent. But for anyone to declare himself openly as an atheist required greater courage, sagacity and tenacity.

Gora (1902-1975), founder of Atheist Centre declared himself as an atheist, and braved the opposition from religion, with grim determination. He was ready to be in the minority of one and tell the truth to the world. He was uncompromising on his principles and sacrificed everything for the cause of atheism.

*(Excerpts from his speech delivered during Literary Meet held at Sangali on 14-15 May 2016)*

[positiveatheist@gmail.com](mailto:positiveatheist@gmail.com)



## **Karnataka dithers over law against superstition**

*Johnson T.A.*

Despite expressing its intent to pass a law to prevent superstitious practices at the start of its term in 2013, the Congress government in Karnataka remains undecided on tabling a bill that would regulate superstitious practices that affect human dignity on account of the fear of a backlash from religious groups and lack of political consensus on the practices to be curbed.

Two drafts of a law called the Karnataka Prevention of Superstitious Practices — one by the National Law School of India and the second by the state social welfare department — have been given to the government over the last three years but neither has been tabled in the legislature on account of fear of opposition to regulation of some of the practices classified as superstitious.

A third version of the law is now being drafted by the social welfare department at the instance of Law Minister T B Jayachandra. This one keeps out controversial practices like Made Snana from the Dakshina Kannada region of Karnataka, where Dalits roll over the remains of food consumed by people from the upper castes.

According to government sources, Made Snana is not being considered for inclusion in the new draft since the government is already challenging the practice in a case in the Supreme Court. The practice was stayed by the Supreme Court in December 2014 on a plea by the state government after the practice had been allowed in a modified form by the Karnataka High Court in 2012. The case is due to be taken up again in July.

A group of progressive intellectuals had sought a ban on Made Snana in 2012 but the high court had provided a halfway solution through a modified Made Snana, with Dalits rolling over food offered to deities rather than leftovers of upper-caste persons. A section of Dalits and tribal communities are among those opposed to the ban.

Although an anti-superstition bill was not part of the election manifesto of the Congress in 2013, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah identified an anti-superstition law for Karnataka as one of his key interests after taking charge of the state. Soon after the Congress came to power in May 2013, the government asked a panel of experts including literary stalwarts, social justice champions and lawyers to look at irrational practices that need to be eradicated to ensure equality and justice.

An expert panel from the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy from the National Law School of India University presented the first draft bill on November 5, 2013, outlawing 13 superstitious practices.

The government was expected to study the model law and draft its own Karnataka Prevention of Superstitious Practices Bill. The model bill held human dignity as its central tenet and sought eradication of irrational practices across communities. Inflicting self-wounds and conversion through bribery were both deemed illegal.

However, within days of the draft bill entering the public domain, it attracted opposition from parties such as the BJP and the JDS, and religious leaders. The BJP called it anti-Hindu and a Lingayat seer called it an attack on the community, the largest in the state. Even leaders in the Congress such as Janardhan Poojary questioned the need for the new law when it had not been among the election promises. The Congress government did not table a draft bill in 2014 as expected.

Some of the proposals under the bill that raised the hackles of religious leaders and parties were banning the carrying of swamijis in palanquins, worshipping of the feet of religious leaders and Made Snana. The first draft proposed banning practices like the Ajalu system (making people eat human excreta, nails, hair etc, as is done in the case of Koragas, a Dalit community in Udupi and Mangalore districts) and the practice of barring some people, including menstruating women, from entering houses of worship or living areas. Vaastu, astrology for gain, horoscope, palmistry, prediction (both predicting and soliciting), seeking and answering questions through divination, sacrifice of living beings were also declared illegal under the model bill.

In 2015, following the killing of rationalist and Kannada writer M M Kalburgi, a fresh demand arose from rationalists and progressive thinkers for the Siddaramaiah government to pass an anti-superstition bill as a mark of respect to Kalburgi.

The social welfare department was tasked with preparing a second draft but this did not reach the legislature either, with the law department rejecting it.

"There are a lot of people who are in favour of a new anti-superstition law but in the absence of political consensus it would be foolhardy to introduce a bill and lose political capital," a government source said.

About the third attempt at a bill, law minister Jayachandra said he is yet to receive a draft that can be tabled.

Courtesy: *Indian Express*



## Karnataka bows to mutts, dilutes superstition bill

*Sandeep Moudgal*

The Karnataka government has done a volte-face again on the anti-superstition bill by removing some key practices, including Made Made Snana, from the list. Bowing to pressure from mutts and pontiffs, and much against the views of rationalists and progressive people, the state government dropped the practice of Made Made Snana (rolling over used plantain leaves of upper caste persons) from the re-drafted anti-superstition bill. Sources said Made Made Snana was removed from the list of preventive practices of superstition based on legal grounds.

"With the Made Made Snana case still being fought in the Supreme Court, it was not correct to include it in the anti-superstition bill," said an official. Chief minister Siddaramaiah had specifically spoken against Made Made Snana and called it an instrument of victimising the SC/STs. Sources in the social welfare department said the fresh draft, after it was sent back by law minister T B Jayachandra, has been renamed the Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and Other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2016.

By removing the all-encompassing name of the Karnataka Evil, Inhuman and Superstitious Practices Prevention Bill, the government has removed all superstitious practices except those followed in the name of religion as being legal and out of bounds. Jayachandra said he's yet to receive a copy of the re-drafted bill. "The previous effort of the social welfare department was not scientific and was sent back by me. I don't know what they have amended. I've asked for the file," he said. Kannada writer Marulsiddappa, who was a member of the committee which supported the preparation of the 2013 bill, and said it's a tragic decision if the government has indeed dropped Made Made Snana from the list. "While it's tragic that people who have gone to the apex court are tribals (*Male Kudiyaaru*) who practise Made Made Snana, it's even more tragic that the government is not exercising its responsibility."

It is wrong to bow down to the mutts and the seers, ban all those archaic and unscientific practices says Varun Hegde. The noted litterateur said the government, especially the CM, must get pontiffs of prominent mutts and rationalists to sit together and debate the finer points of the draft bill. The govt dropped Made Made Snana (rolling over used plantain leaves of upper caste persons) from the list though CM Siddaramaiah had called it an instrument of victimising people belonging to the SC/STs.

Courtesy: *Times of India*

## Like Ambedkar, Rohith had no nation

Anshul Trivedi

The suicide of Rohith Vemula is being met with two kinds of responses – while the Dalit and Progressive sections are calling it an ‘institutionalized murder’, where a Dalit boy was driven to suicide by the administration; the other response paints it as an individual act where caste had no role to play nor could anyone be blamed for it. One must not politicize a tragedy goes the refrain. The Union Minister for Human Resource Development seems to be of the latter view, as she repeated again and again that we should not make this an issue of caste discrimination, not now that we are in 2016.

So was it an act of a distressed individual who happened to be a Dalit or an act caused because of caste discrimination? In other words, was it a political act? To answer these questions one needs to examine Hindutva’s approach to identities and caste within its larger project of Hindu Nationalism.

### Why such keen interest?

The question we must ask is: If this was just a regular skirmish between students; why was the MHRD, which has the Herculean responsibility of educating millions of Indians, so interested in disciplining these five boys in the entire country? What explains this special attention to these students?

In the course of this hearing two Union Ministries got involved. Bandaru Dattatreya, MoS Labour and MP from Telangana personally wrote to Smriti Irani, MHRD, Government of India, to take cognizance of the matter and ever since the MHRD followed this case keenly with the administration with a series of letters being sent from the highest authority urging the administration to act in this case.

### The anti-national Dalits: The Political Context of Rohith’s punishment

Bandaru Dattatreya in his letter to the HRD Minister calls Rohith and his friends anti-national because they protested against the death penalty awarded to Yakub Memon. Dattatreya wrote:

*“Hyderabad University ... has become a den of casteist, extremist and anti-national politics. This could be visualized from the fact that when Yakub Memon was hanged, a dominant student’s union, that is, the Ambedkar Students’ Association has held protests against the execution”*

Abolition of capital punishment is a legitimate debate which has been going on across the world. Even if we overlook the difficult moral question of giving the State the legitimate power to take the life of a citizen; the glaring inconsistencies in the awarding of death penalties in the recent past in India; the proven fact that it is not a deterrent in stopping violent crime and that majority of the civilized world has done away with the penalty; should have been reasons enough to question capital punishment. But according to Mr. Dattatreya, organizing and protesting for the abolition of death penalty, which it must be noted, Babasaheb Ambedkar was himself against, was an anti-national act for which these students needed to be punished.

### Don’t talk about caste before we gain independence if you are a nationalist –

This is not the first time that Dalits are being labeled as anti-national. Even during our anti-colonial struggle, Dr. Ambedkar and many non-Brahmins, anti-caste leaders were accused of being anti-national. At the time the mainstream nationalist discourse asked the Dalits to overlook the violence,

discrimination and humiliation inherent in the caste system; and unite to overthrow the British. However, the British legal system of equality before the law was liberating for the Dalits as opposed to the codes governing the Hindu society; where the Dalits were treated as inferior and impure by accident of their birth - something which Rohith also refers to in his suicide note - and there was no scope for equality or justice. So the non-brahmin and Dalit movement kept on petitioning with the British Raj, until untouchability eradication and the violence of the caste system was acknowledged as an evil by the mainstream nationalist movement led by Congress.

Even after this acknowledgement, while the non-brahmin movement and the nationalist movement could build a strategic consensus on the goal of attaining independence, it was not without disagreements and debates. So while they were together in the fight against the British Raj, they maintained separate positions on many issues. This stark difference has been well documented in the debates that Ambedkar had with Gandhi and the Congress.

**Don't talk about caste at all: Now we are independent and we are Hindus:**

We seem to have come a full circle. Today's dominant nationalist discourse is based on Hindutva; which aims at culling out claims of difference of particular communities from the social and the political discourse. In the Hindutva imagination, we are all Hindus, which in turn are synonymous with being Indians, as this is our "punyabhoomi" or holy land. The fact that the Hindu social order itself is based on graded inequality and ritually sanctioned violence, discrimination and humiliation is supposed to be ignored.

The major challenges from the point of view of the Hindutva project in the unification of the Hindu fold and therefore, the challenge to Hindu power, is the challenge to the Hindu social order from the Dalits from the inside and from the Muslims and Christians from the outside. This political - cultural project to forge a semitised Hindu identity entails twin maneuvers of internal assimilation of hitherto oppressed castes into the Hindu fold and the domination and stigmatization of non-hindu minorities outside of it.

Unlike the Left or the Congress, the politics of the Hindutva brigade aims at reinvention of the self, the creation of the "new hindu man", and therefore, takes an everyday form. This politics includes rewriting histories of Dalit groups and reinvention of their traditions to integrate them into the Hindu fold. In the past Ekalavya who was wronged by Dronacharya for not being a savarna has been co-opted in to the pantheon of Hindu gods; similarly Shabri, the tribal woman in the Ramayana has been elevated to the status of a Goddess by the Hindutva forces.

**Be a Harijan, not an Ambedkarite:**

In India, defining oneself is itself a political act. The Dalit identity has sought to be defined predominantly through two approaches. Gandhi sought to define the Dalit identity from the prism of Hinduism. He coined the term "Harijan" and said that everyone was equal in the eyes of God, and that the Dalits were children of God as well. He also initiated campaigns to end untouchability and took measures like encouraging inter dining, asking upper caste Hindus to clean toilets, which in those times was a challenge to upper caste orthodoxy. However, this was an approach at accommodation within the Hindu fold.

The Dalit movement, however, contested this coinage as insufficient and patronizing. In their view, it was insufficient to be equal in the eyes of God; it is the equality in the here and now that one needs to achieve. It is for this reason that Ambedkar opted for converting out of Hinduism. It was a means of de-anchoring the Dalits from the intellectual, moral and spiritual codes of orthodox Hinduism. His conversion to Buddhism was an act of defining the self outside the moral gaze of Hinduism. In other words, it was a rejection of Hinduism.

It is in this context, that the self definition of Rohith and his friends, in opposition to Sanskritised Hinduism, becomes a political act. It was this rebellion which was irksome. According to the Hindutva project, the *Harijan* is not a challenge, unlike a Muslim or a Christian and has to be co-opted; however, a *Harijan* cannot define herself but must let herself be defined by the Hindutva forces. In other words, a docile *Harijan* is a nationalist, but an *Ambedkarite* is an anti-national.

It must be borne in mind that the Ambedkar Students' Association (ASA) had organised beef eating programs in the past, which is a direct political cultural challenge to the Hindutva forces' claim that the cow is revered by all Hindus. However, what is an even bigger challenge to the Hindutva dispensation is the advocacy for the human rights of Muslims by a Dalit organisation. It should be noted that Dattatreya had called the MHRD's attention to the anti-national activities of ASA. The ASA had screened 'Muzzaffarnagar Baaki Hai' and protested against the death penalty of Memon. A similar kind of response awaited the Dalits of Bhagana, Haryana. When they lost hope of attaining justice from the State, they did a strange (?) thing. They converted to Islam. In response, they were beaten up by the Hindutva organizations.

### **The alignment of Dalit – Muslim interests: A Nightmare for the Hindutva Project:**

In a competitive electoral system, the electoral strength of these two communities makes for a formidable coalition. This solidarity of interests amongst those internally oppressed by *Hinduism* and those dominated outside by *Hindutva* is an unprecedented political and cultural challenge.

The political approach of Hindutva at dealing with caste therefore, is: firstly, not to speak about it or make it subservient to an abstract nationalism; and secondly, to pit Dalit interests against Muslims to prevent a cultural and political coalition. It is in this context that one needs to see the Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Thaawarchand Gehlot's letter to MHRD congratulating them for questioning Jamia Milia Islamia University's minority status; for he argues that it is undermining the interests and representation of the Dalits, Tribes and the OBC's in higher educational institutions. Similar attempts at pitting Dalit - Bahujans against Muslims were made by none other than PM Modi in his election rallies in the run up to the Bihar elections when he warned the electorate that if the Mahagathbandhan came to power it will give your reservation to a "particular community".

In its strategy with regard to caste, the saffron forces have coined the slogan of "Samrasata" (harmony) in opposition to "Samata" (equality). This has guided their strategies of co-option of castes within the Hindu fold. The 2014 general election which propelled Modi – led BJP to power was noted for smashing the Congress off the electoral map. However, two important events must be mentioned. One was the comprehensive rout of Mandal parties. Since the Babri Demolition, after an initial opposition to reservations, the RSS-BJP has strategically been co-opting OBC's within its fold. This is reflected by

the volte – face of the RSS on reservations; of course it continues to speak in a forked tongue as it has to consolidate its essentially upper constituency. So for the first time BJP's PM candidate was showcasing his non-brahmin credentials in an electoral campaign. A stagnation in Mandal politics forced by the erosion of employment opportunities within the ambit of the State with increasing privatization and advance of the Market along with anti-incumbency paid rich dividends in the elections.

But secondly and more significantly victories registered by the BJP in the states of UP and Bihar meant that these States were unable to return even a single Muslim MP this time around despite a huge Muslim population. Interestingly the BSP retained its vote share but was also unable to return even a single MP this time around. This was seen as a defeat of so-called vote bank politics.

It was this raw nerve that Rohith and his friends touched when one excluded identity spoke for the other. It was this potentially politically subversive act which invited such intense scrutiny from the highest echelons of power in Delhi.

In 1931, when Gandhi questioned Ambedkar about his criticism of the Congress which he construed as criticism of the Indian national struggle, Ambedkar replied by saying, "I have no homeland. No untouchable worth the name would be proud of this land."

The consolidation of the power of Hindutva has successfully "denationalized" the "suspect" Muslim community in 2014. It is quite logical then, that if Dalits spoke out for Muslims in Muzzaffarnagar and against the death penalty, it was only a matter of time before they shall be labeled anti-national as well. The attempts at building a coalition of those excluded from the Hindutva public are in their nascent stages, and it is difficult to predict whether it will materialise in the future or not. However, the charge of anti-nationalism levelled against Rohith and his friends tells us how easily a marginalised community can be "denationalised" and in turn what ideological function the category of nationalism performs in the Hindutva project.

Make no mistake; Rohith's suspension and suicide, both were profoundly political acts. And like Ambedkar, even after six and a half decades of independence he had no nation.

*Author is a PhD scholar in CPS/JNU*

Courtesy: [www.vikalp.ind.in](http://www.vikalp.ind.in)

■■■

## The Idea of India

*Ram Puniyani*

As we welcome the New Year (2016) with hope and optimism, the events of the year gone by flash to our mind, those events which going to have influences in the times to come. We saw that the politics of the BJP led NDA government was practically marked by the controlling agenda of Hindu nationalism dictated by RSS. With the statements of the Sadhvis, Sakhis and Yogis the atmosphere of hate towards minorities saw a peak of sorts. Be it the issue of beef eating, love jihad or rational thinking; these elements came down heavily on the values of Indian democracy, principles of Indian Constitution and atmosphere of amity nurtured by Indian ethos for centuries. The sense of security of minorities was heavily undermined as Yogi Adityanath made hateful speeches, or as Giriraj Singh advised those not

voting for Modi to go to Pakistan. With Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar advising the beef eaters to go to Pakistan, it became clear that the ruling party is hell bent to intensify the atmosphere of Hate towards the religious minorities.

The peak of the display of mindset of Hindu nationalists, led by Prime Minister Modi himself came to the fore when Sharukh Khan joined the likes of Kiran Majumdar Shaw, Narayan Murti and Raghuram Rajan in saying that there is an atmosphere of growing intolerance in the society. When Aamir Khan just shared his chat with his wife Kiran Rao that she feels insecure in the country and is particularly for their son, hell was let loose by these leaders in condemning him. When Shahrukh Khan, out of decency, apologized for his statement, Kailash Vijayvargiya the BJP General Secretary pounced on him saying that the nationalists (Hindu nationalists) have taught a lesson to morons. This is a sample of the atmosphere created by the Modi sarkar and full fledged efforts by the vast Sangh Parivar. This was running parallel to the retuning of awards by writers, artists, filmmakers, scientists and activists. The return of awards was also heavily condemned and mocked at by the so called fringe elements and their follower's active on social media.

Against this background came the fresh wind from Bihar Assembly election results. The elections were well fought with PM Modi putting all his resources and energy, using caste and communal cards to win the elections. The people of Bihar, who earlier had halted Advani's Rath Yatra (which was a major instigator of communal violence), now came forward to save whatever the nation has achieved through the freedom movement. The results of elections not only deflated the balloon of Hate politics of Modi led politics, it also gave a hope to minorities and all those struggling to preserve the liberal and democratic space. This more or less brought a halt to the process of returning awards; it also sent the hate spewers on a sort of sabbatical.

With this has begun the process of coming together of forces believing in pluralism to come together. This process has not only begun at electoral level but even at social level the committed groups and individuals have started making efforts for joint campaigns for preservation of 'idea of India'. This has also led to deep introspection by society at large and intellectual-activists in particular, as to how do we go about to combat the forces which have created an atmosphere of intolerance using the issues of demonization of minorities by distorting history. There is a growing realization that our democracy cannot be saved just by electoral maneuvers, we need to operate at social level to bring back the awareness about the civilizational fusion between different religious communities. The communal forces have also used the issues like love jihad and ghar wapasi to demonize the religious minorities.

The coming year will see the intensification of these processes at higher level. Last year also saw that Hindutva forces are co-opting dalits and Adivasis in a big measure. The architect of Indian constitution Dr. Bhimrao Babasaheb Ambedkar is being appropriated by the communal forces. The large sections of dalits and Adivasis, most of the activists and intellectuals working on the issues of marginalized sections of society are becoming conscious of this fact and coming forward to ensure that the teachings of Ambedkar are not distorted and mauled by Hindu nationalists. The coming year is full of hope for the



religious minorities, dalits, Adivasis and women for more dignified and humane treatment by society at large. The life of dignity and honor bacons the social movements.

At the economic level this government is undertaking efforts to do away with social welfare. The most fundamental needs of marginalized sections have been undermined by this government. The efforts to have right to food, right to employment, right to information, right to health and education need to be brought to the fore. Social movements need to gear up to see that the movements for these rights are upheld by broader campaigns and agitations. The social movements do look forward to raising platforms where they can jointly raise these issues and strengthen the march of the process of social empowerment of weaker sections of society.

The divisive politics is part of the package deal where authoritarianism becomes stronger. The growing centralization of power in the hands of 'The Great leader' will be checked only through broadening and deepening of the social movements for rights of weaker sections of society. The coming year is crucial as for as turning the tide of national politics is concerned. We need to move away from divisive, sectarian and authoritarian politics which has been imposed by the Modi sarkar. This Government is for a political front for the regressive Hindu nationalism being spearheaded by those who at deeper level want to do away with the values of freedom movement and the principles of our Constitution. One can see the game of organizing Constitution day and undermining the values inherent in Indian Constitution being done at the same time. One looks forward to 2016 as the year which will define the foundations of our politics, which is committed to oppose the narrowness of present government. This year is full of aspirations for reviving the spirit of unity of Gandhi, the values of Ambedkar and principles of the foundation of Modern India laid down by Jawaharlal Nehru.



## Unholy Nexus: Dabholkar-Pansare-Kalburgi murders

*Megha Pansare*

Bullet cartridges in the three killings suggest a common set of killers, accused Sameer Gaikwad and Rudra Patil likely to be commonly involved; Sanatan Prabhat the organ of Sanathan Sanstha has 'marked' out Dabholkar and Pansare as 'targets' yet the union home ministry tells Parliament that there are no connections?

Presently, the writ petitions of the Dabholkar and Pansare families pressing for fair investigation have been clubbed together by the Bombay High Court after observing the similarity in both the murders. The Sanatan Sanstha, the organization believed to be behind the killings, has even published a photograph of Dabholkar, marked over with a red cross. One Sanatan Sadhak, Malgonda Patil, who was killed while trying to execute a bomb blast in Madgaon, Goa had also written an article in Sanatan Prabhat, articulating the need to eliminate Dr. Narendra Dabholkar. This Malgonda Patil happens to be a cousin of Rudra Patil. The sketch of one of the suspected murderer in the Dabholkar murder case has a

striking similarity with the sketch of Pravin Limkar, who is a prime accused in Goa bomb blast case and is on an Interpol red corner lookout notice. The accused in the Pansare murder case, namely Sameer Gaikwad is a member of Sanatan Sanstha. The members of Sanatan Sanstha have even addressed a press conference in support of Sameer Gaikwad after his arrest.

Other revealing facts have come on record in the ongoing writ petition filed by the Pansare family in the Bombay High Court:

- that, one Rudra Patil, who is also an accused in the Goa bomb blast case and is a member of Sanatan Sanstha, has also some role in the Pansare murder case;
- that the wife of Rudra Patil is representing Sameer Gaikwad in the court.

It has also come on record before the Judicial Magistrate, Kolhapur, dealing with Pansare murder case that Sameer Gaikwad, an accused in Pansare murder case and the absconding Rudra Patil, an accused in Goa bomb blast case are friends and have an otherwise close association and relationship.

(According to a report in The Indian Express on December 11, 2015 among the angles of investigation being pursued by the three agencies involved –CBI, Karnataka CID and Maharashtra SIT – is of the possible involvement of four missing members of the right wing Sanathan Sanstha who are accused in a 2009 blast case in Margao, Goa. The four missing persons — Jai Prakash alias Anna and Rudra Patil, both from Karnataka, and Sarang Kulkarni alias Sarang Akolkar and Praveen Limkar from Maharashtra — have been sought by multiple agencies for over six years. “We tried to find them but were not able to do so. Initial investigations showed that they escaped to Nepal. Sometime in 2014, they were reported to have returned,” said an NIA investigator who was a part of the investigations into the 2009 Goa blast plot in which two alleged Sanathan Sanstha men were killed while trying to plant a bomb to disrupt a celebration they were opposed to.)

Given all these facts and circumstances, the statement of the union minister of state for home, Mr. Kiren Rijju made through a written reply to Rajya Sabha (December 3, 2015) that there is no report to suggest any linkage or connection between murders of comrade Govind Pansare, Dr. Narendra Dabholkar and professor Kalburgi is shocking.

We, the family members of Dabholkar and Pansare families, have already expressed our disagreement with his statement as it is contradicts the facts on record. We also wish to know on what basis this statement was made by the minister. Now, today, when reports of the forensic analysis of the bullet cartridges found at the scene of all three incidents suggests the probable involvement of a common set of killers, it becomes essential that the home ministry of the union government immediately issues a clarification on the previous statement made in Parliament.

There is a striking similarity in the modus operandi of these three murders. The three murders have long been suspected to be the handiwork of a right wing group opposed to the outspoken and rational views of the three victims who have consistently criticised the irrational practices and beliefs within the Hindu religious system.

When the investigating agencies in all three murder cases are closely coordinating with each other, how can it be stated that there is no connection between these three murders? Tracing the absconding

Rudra Patil has become an important task for the agencies investigating these murders. Counsel for the CBI, Rebecca Gonsalves on November 30, 2015, even made a statement in the High Court to the effect that two members of the 'same organization' are under scanner and their phone numbers are under surveillance.

According to the CBI submission in the Bombay High Court, on November 30, 2015, ninety- five members of 'a right wing organisation' were interrogated and their statements recorded. The said organisation was upset with this and therefore made allegations against the investigating Officer, by holding a press conference. The said set of documents has been filed before the Bombay High Court.

All this clearly establishes that the investigating agencies are presently examining the role of the Sanathan Sanstha in both the Dabholkar and the Pansare murder cases. The points listed above sketch the close similarity between the two cases. Hence the statement of the minister of state for home, Kiren Rijju, in Parliament is misleading and not based on facts.

Besides the records of the investigation mentioned above, both Dabholkar and Pansare were targets of the Sanathan Sanstha, as revealed by other evidence mentioned above. As only Dabholkar and Pansare cases are being heard by the Mumbai High Court, the High Court has not made any comment on the Kalburgi case and hence this statement does not encompass that murder investigation.

We demand that an immediate clarification from the government of the previous statement is made by MOs home, Kiren Rijju.

Courtesy: <https://sabrangindia.in/indepth/unholy-nexus-dabholkar-pansare-kalburgi-murders>



**“I share bond with every writer  
who is wholeheartedly engaged in the cultural struggle”**

*Pradnya Daya Pawar*

('Pradnya Daya Pawar' is a renowned figure in Indian literature. There are very few writers who break the barriers laid down by the establishment to put forth visions and glimpses of a new world. Pradnya Pawar belongs to this category. She is a courageous writer who bravely puts forth the woman's side in a conservative patriarchal society which denies to acknowledge and treat a woman as a human being. Man-woman relations, woman's suffocation and sorrows arising out of patriarchy, her fight with self at physical and mental levels-these are various themes which find strong articulation through her stories as well as poetry.

Never afraid to take position and always articulate to voice resistance to injustice in any forms, Pradnya Pawar recently returned the state awards along with award money in protest of rising intolerance and

violence against intellectuals and voices of reason. The regressive forces targeted her and there was criticism all around about this return of awards. However, she didn't budge and remained steadfast with her protest of such intolerance. This interview is especially in this context, while also discussing her literary journey. )

*You came to be associated with writing and literature through Daya Pawar. So he had a major influence on you writing or there were other influences as well?*

It is a biological coincidence that I was born to an activist-writer like Daya Pawar and Hira Pawar, my mother who was extremely strong-willed and strict. However, coincidences like these are certainly life changing. Indeed, it is my upbringing and family environment which is responsible for me turning a writer. In fact, I would say, my childhood played a formative role in my writing. Although the material conditions were unfavourable, practical life was full of scarcities of every sort and I do not have some ancestral property; however, I hold a proud lineage of movement, the world of ideas, study and accompanying rigour, and frank and fearless voicing of opinion. I would certainly count my father Daya Pawar first among the major influencing figures in my literary journey-his attitude, lifestyle, and empathy have deeply influenced me. The second major influence is of Namdeo Dhasal, and third is the Phule-Ambekarite movement, especially Dalit Panthers. My readings in the context of these movements, as well as world cinema, theatre, music have broadened my horizons and saved me from turning parochial or one-sided. I have come across many renowned people, whom I consider as centres of living knowledge.

*Perspective on Man-woman relations is always at the heart of your writing....*

I would rather consider politics as the centre of all my writing. Man-woman relations is one prominent form of that politics and hence it figures accordingly in my writing. In fact, politics is all-encompassing. It is part of public as well as private spaces; indeed, this dichotomy of public versus private itself is the fruition of a political move of hegemonic ruling establishment. What then is this politics, what are its intrinsic forces, what is its reach, reality of caste, class, gender, the predatory form of neoliberal economy and changed circumstances under globalisation-I believe these are the questions which form the crux of my writing. Furthermore, there is a meta-reality of market and media. The predicament of people in this complex situation, especially those people from deprived sections and women-how their lives are shaped up-this is what I try to capture through my writing. Right from my first collection of poems 'Antastha' to the recently published 'Drushyancha dhobal samudra'-there is definite Journey and it is certainly not uni-linear.

Even if we speak of 'woman' in abstract, still, everything changes with the question 'which woman'. I have always very consciously avoided stereotyping or essentialising woman through my writings. And even men have several facets, several aspects. And perhaps, this is the reason why young men and women, who think differently, can immediately relate with my writings-be it my collection of stories like 'Afawa khari tharavi mhanun' or a play like 'dhadant khairlanji'. In fact, I don't like literature which is preaching or only agitational. I can never write columns after columns full of sloganeering and such

materials. Just take the simple example of man-woman relation: it consists of so many different things on different levels. The narration of my story cannot forego the perspective of historical, dialectical stages of development and that is quite obvious. Because I am writing in a period after Baburao Bagul, Daya Pawar, Namdeo Dhasal. So if I have assimilated and acknowledged this as lineage; then I have no option but to break through several layers of obvious, common sensical symbolism. In fact, life of no human being is easy. Nothing is easy. I have learnt this lesson of life-facing hardships and swallowing insults, I have paid a huge price to keep alive my will to write. And sometimes it has so happened that my poetry has surpassed my life, and is mocking me saying-'ab kya karogi, main to nikal padi'-now what will you do, I am on my path!

Even if you speak about body, I have observed that body is never viewed as body as such. Body is always caught in the clutches of morality, tradition and the 'social'. In fact, human beings and their bodies, their existence is always very creative and intrinsically egalitarian and therefore, capitalism, patriarchy & brahmanism: these systems turn the human body into a mechanical existence. And in a country like India, where all three systems coexist, human body, sexuality and human relations undergo complete perversion. It is a common practice to vilify something which holds the potential to blow apart the establishment. Human body holds the inherent potential to transcend all these exploitative systems-precisely since this potential is known, the human body (especially that of a woman's) is enchained more and more. No exploitative hierarchical system can afford a lively human body. I deploy these structures in several of my stories. Incidentally, some so-called Ambedkarites tried to run a maligning campaign terming these stories immoral, however, it didn't succeed.

*What was your experience of writing a play like 'Dhadant Khairlanji'?*

The Ambedkarite followers were seriously perturbed after the Khairlanji massacre[1]. Everyone was deeply hurt with this terrible caste violence. The horrifying manner in which Priyanka, Roshan, Sudhir and Surekha were killed, raised a fundamental question-why the Dalits should face such tragedies time and again while following the path of self-respect laid down by Dr. Ambedkar. It was the first time after independence when the entire Dalit community came out on streets without any proactive leadership. Even people with white-collar jobs participated. I myself was a participant in several protests and events happening at that time. In fact, during that period, I wrote a long poem titled 'Love in the time of Khairlanji'. I would like to quote few of its lines here:

'Just when the scars of scarcity were being healed  
just when the ancient puzzle of the dark was being deciphered  
Just when the peace had started to acquire a tranquil sound.  
I had thought-  
the past has shed its worn out skin  
and these old tears of sorrow  
of several ages  
we swallowed it

Taking it for a glass of poison  
 ....still kept having horrifying dream of shedding delusions  
 For nth time.  
 In broad daylight,  
 at night-middle of the night,  
 At any spell, any season.  
 the calendar just kept fluttering-  
 Back and forth'

Rajdatt, a famous director in Marathi, wanted to make a film on Khairlanji. He offered me to write the script and dialogues for this film. We met a few times regarding this film proposal. However, due to certain reasons, or say, due to my other priorities, I declined the offer. However, the thought remained with me. This play on Khairlanji was written in these several contexts.

Of course, I didn't want to portray on stage what actually happened in Khairlanji. In fact, for me 'Khairlanji' was not taking place in some 'distant faraway place' or 'some rustic, rural hinterland' or in some sort of a vacuum. It was a 'systemic crisis' denouncing the constitutional values of the entire Indian society. Along with this, I was trying to take stock of the Ambedkarite movement. I had somewhere in my mind, the notion of forming of different layers and hierarchy within Ambedkarite community. I wanted to assimilate all these tracks and depict them together. I did it in my own way. Several readings of this play were organized, at various colleges and universities, also in Prithvi theater. Readings were usually followed by discussions. A fact worth mentioning-Konkan Marathi Sahitya Parishad, Karjat Branch (District Raigad) staged this play for State drama competition. Afterwards, few years went past in anticipation that somebody would step forward to stage this play for commercial theatre. I met many directors-producers in this regard. However, nobody was much interested now in Khairlanji. Then I decided to produce the play myself and brought it out under the banner of our 'Lokayat Creations'. This was certainly some sort of a brave act to bring it out on commercial theatre because I had no previous experience in this regard. However, I learnt a great deal from this play. This play was staged in various parts of Maharashtra-Mumbai, Thane, Vidarbha, Marathwada, Western-Southern Maharashtra. I could speak directly with people after the play as they had lots of questions. Certainly this experience taught me a lot and enriched me. Basically, play is a collective art. Its success and failure is also collective. I certainly knew that this play is not going to be money spinner; but I bore the financial brunt and staged the play out of a political conviction.

*Could you recount any memorable moment in your writing journey and any particular piece/form of your writing you feel most connected with?*

I don't have any discriminate affinity towards a particular form of writing. I feel equally connected with all forms of literature I laid my hands on. You have to recognize the strengths and crucial areas of each form, study them in depth, and you have to devote adequate time for that. Of course regular practice is must. I have had great joy and challenges in writing everything-poetry, periodical columns, plays,

stories as well as critical reviews. Perhaps you can say I feel most close with poetry as I have been writing poems for a longish period of time. But at the same time, I feel that writing poetry is the most difficult thing to do, as it swallows you a lot emotionally.

Talking about memorable incidents-there is one incident when I was studying and writing a bit as well. Till then none of my poetry collections had been published. However, my poems had started to appear in 'Anushtubh', 'Asmitadarsh' and several Diwali issues of daily newspapers. Durga Bhagwat had written me a letter after reading my one poem 'trishna'. That was one unforgettable moment for me. I have dedicated my collection of stories titled 'Afawa khari Tharavi mhanun' (to make the rumour true) to a great story writer of Marathi, Kamal Desai as well as Urmila Pawar, the author of 'Aaydan'. After reading the book, Kamal tai called me and after showering praises on me, she said, "I want to feed you at my home. So tell me what food do you like-I will cook for you myself one day. I was full of tears listening to her. Of course, it couldn't happen-she passed away in the meantime. I will always have this scar.

*Which author you like the most?*

As I said earlier, I became aware of social exploitation through my family upbringing and the same upbringing made me aware that you can battle with this exploitation, you can fight even through your pen. The walls of the home were full of books. Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, Rajkamal Chaudhary, Adneya, Ismat Chughtai, Harishankar Parsai, Manto, Vinod Kumar Shukla, Kamaleshwar, Mahasweta Devi, Dhoomil, Qurratul Ain Haider, Premchand, Shreekant Verma, Vishnu Khare, Sahir Ludhianvi, Jaun Nissar, Faiz, Paash, Amrita Preetam, Sukanta Bhattacharya, Mayakovsky, Brecht, Ho Chi Minh, Octavio Paz and Neruda have all broadened the horizons for me.

Certainly I acknowledge the link with the Marathi poetic tradition in which I write. The strong current of Marathi Dalit literature and poetry, which took up cudgels with the Marathi literary establishment-raised certain pertinent fundamental questions about the division of literature in closets like individualist, collectivist, aesthetic etc. I felt these questions were very important. The synthesis of reflective thought and feelings, the sublation of 'individual' into the 'collective', firm foundation of this collectivity, new social-cultural epistemological insight, non separation from ideology, and to have an utopian vision of a society based on humanity and equality: the Dalit poetry gave me many such wonderful treasures. This is a really glorious legacy and history. The Dalit literature was described as sociologically analytical, politically explosive, and aesthetically bewildering. I think the Dalit autobiographies, especially the Dalit women's autobiographies are extremely important-because Baby Kamble, Shanta Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Hira Pawar underscored the Dalit feminist message of Dalit women's contribution in making history through such autobiographies. Even my poetry has been labelled feminist, Dalit feminist, Dalit Bahujan feminist etc. and I am pretty comfortable with all such labels.

The Marathi poetry prior to emergence of Dalit poetry was mainly under the influence of B. C. Mardhekar, P.S. Rege and Sharatchandra Muktibodh. Mardhekar broke the established norms of

decadent romantic poetry tradition and truly modernised the Marathi poetry. Muktibodh also was defying the tradition of romantic tradition and writing a political poetry of social commitment. However, P. S. Rege revived the romantic tradition. However, with Vinda Karandikar and especially Narayan Surve's Marxist thought, the stream of modern poetry grew stronger. It is because of this commitment to modernity, I feel the poets like Arun Kolatkar, D. P. Chitre, Vasant Abaji Dahake, Tulsi Parab, Prakash Jadhav, Satish Kalasekar, Manohar Oak, Chandrakant Patil, Arunchandra Gawali are important.

Among the poetesses, I feel closest to the Saint Janabai, Soyarabai, and in modern times, Bahinabai Chaudhary, and the ones like Prabha Ganorkar, Anuradha Patil, Rajni Parulekar, Hira Bansode, Jyoti Lanjewar, and Malika Amar Sheikh; who truly rendered modernity to the poetry of female sensibility. In a sense, I share a bond with every author who is wholeheartedly engaged in the cultural struggle. They seem like true relatives and provide me the strength.

*What will you say about the young writers?*

I do read many of them. I will not name particular ones, but I find many of the present young writers, poets, poetesses quite promising. They are extremely serious, conscious and aware. They have a very good understanding about society, overall system and they have the introvert attitude along with it. However, this introvert attitude is today complemented by social media which is totally extrovert. It leads to the creative expression remaining at a superficial level and doesn't go the root of the matter. Sooner they realize this danger, better.

*What are your present writing projects?*

I was busy with my doctoral thesis over last two-three years. Therefore I had kept aside all my writing projects. But now I have a lot of things in mind. Let us see how it goes. One book of collection of my newspaper columns is coming up called 'Tehaltikori' from Akshar Prakashan.

*The regressive forces have murdered Dr. Dabholkar, Comrade Pansare and Prof. Kalburgi. Not only that, they have easily moved over. How would you comment as a writer on the present social situation?*

*What is the position behind returning the awards?*

We are going through a period of undeclared emergency. This kind of emergency is more horrifying than the emergency of 1975. That is because, in 1975, it was only the State which was doing surveillance on common people. Now, it is not only the State, but also the ruling party members, are carrying out this surveillance on behalf of the State. And they are everywhere-from places of residence, to places of employment. There is an unprecedented dictatorial manner in every walk of life-education, science, arts, literature, and overall entire cultural world. Our public sphere of debate has become really hideous, obscene.

The gruesome mob killing of Mohammad Akhlaq in Dadri, the ban on Muslim youth to participate in Garba, the continuing cycle of Dalit killings, Love jihad, Ghar wapsi campaigns-these are the things



going on. The situation has deteriorated so much so that if you cannot debate rationally with voices of reason, then simply kill these voices and shut them up forever-this is where we have come to. Dnyanpeeth winning Marathi author Bhalchandra Nemade has been provided police protection (after he received threats). Yesterday, Girish Karnad has received a threat that he will be killed. The murders of Dr. Dabholkar, Comrade Pansare and Prof. Kalburgi prove again that any voice of dissent will not be tolerated. The point is not only about freedom of expression of writers, and their safety of life and honour. It certainly is, but even common people of Maharashtra, India are living under this constant shadow of terror. The poison of communalism is being spread in India on purpose. What to eat, how to live, whom to love, whom not to love, what to dress, how to express-there are people all around me living under a constant shadow of fear over these things. While underlining the fundamental issue of freedom of expression of writers and artists, we should not forget that the State is attacking the common people's right to life.

The roots of today's situation lie in the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992. Advani's Rathayatra had partitioned the country again on religious grounds. But even now when they are in power, they don't seem to possess the rational, tolerant approach necessary to run the country. The people in top positions of the government are recklessly making provocative anti-social statements. And Hindutva organisations like VHP, Hindu Rashtra Samiti, Sanatan Sanstha are going further and doing actual violence, breaking the rule of law. It is their rule based on violence and terror. If you do not follow our diktats, then we have the right to punish you there and then, because this government is follower of our ideology-this is their stance. It leads to structures of parallel government, state, and the state becomes a mute spectator. As usual, the foot soldiers of these regressive forces are from Bahujan samaj, however, they are remote controlled by RSS. This government has come to power taking help of such means and such forces. This is an all round assault on fundamental values and principles of Indian constitution itself. I decided to return all the state awards I had received along with the prize money in order to protest this assault.

*What has been your experience after return of the awards? What were the reactions? What will be the next step of this cultural movement?*

I returned awards and immediately afterwards, many Marathi writers returned their awards. At the moment, their number is quite large. We all went together to Mantralaya (Maharashtra Government office) and returned the awards. The meaning of this is clear: everyone was angry and annoyed with the present situation. Only somebody needed to take the lead. Actually I was also waiting for this lead to come from Sahitya Akademi winning writers in Marathi. Anyhow I hoped that, if not Award Wapsi, at least this cultural movement across the country will receive the support and boost from the world of Marathi letters. However, nothing like that was happening. On the contrary there was ridicule.

About the reactions-well, we have been at the receiving end of endless criticism and mockery. The word is that we are 'Congressi, Sickular' etc. Many people say-'we are exaggerating the actual situation. And didn't intolerant things occur during Congress rule'?

There is a difference here. The all round attack on the constitutional values which is going on at present, was not the case ever before. There was no interference in the private space-what to eat, what to write. The literary 'suicide' of Perumal Murugan, M. M. Basheer-a senior writer and researcher of Ramayana from Calicut, Kerala deciding not to write about Ramayana, Chetna Tirthahalli - the Kannada writer who criticised the ban on cow slaughter receiving threats of rape-we are witnessing a tremendous amount of pressures upon writers, and they are growing. These regressive forces have taken a stand that we will not let anybody do a critique/enquiry of Hinduism; what they say is the final word on Hinduism. Huchangi Prasad, a Kannada Dalit writer who wrote against the caste system, was abducted and beaten up as his writing 'insulted Hinduism' and he was further threatened that if he continued to write in similar way, his fingers will be chopped off in punishment. In such circumstances, I believe it is my responsibility to take a firm stand and oppose this terrorism.

The government criticised the authors who returned the awards-calling them dishonest, Congress, living in State provided housing etc. This is my open challenge to anyone to pick up any of my writing and show the praise of Congress. The consistent criticism of our decision to return the awards only goes to prove that this act has really hit them hard. Hence by invoking irrelevant charges against us, they are trying to shift the attention away from the issues we have raised. We should not forget that if rulers try to keep people under terror all the time, then the people one day can throw the rulers out of power. People taught this lesson to Indira Gandhi and now the people of Bihar also taught the same lesson to Narendra Modi. I am a representative of these common people and I am not at all pessimist. Therefore I feel that everyone should come together and build strength to foil this attack on Indian democracy.

To return awards is just the small beginning. Now the writers-artists need to collectively raise their voice and that also has started. The writers from Gujarat, Goa and Maharashtra who are returning awards as well as the ones supporting it, have recently organised a new initiative named 'Dakshinayan'. This bunch of writers organised public meetings in 3 cities-Pune, Kolhapur and Dharwad. Writers are not a strong community. And they cannot afford to keep paid security guards for personal safety, not they can fathom such a thing. The pen in their hand and their voice is their only means of expression. It is the need of the hour to vow to fight with all the means.

*(This Interview was first published in [www.mulakhat.com](http://www.mulakhat.com) in Marathi on Nov.22, 2015. Original interview in Marathi was done by Sujata Shirsath, English translation by Rahul Vaidya)*

■■■

## While Propagating Rationalism

*Datta Desai*

Why were Dr Narendra Dabholkar and Comrade Govind Pansare gunned down? Not because they had adopted an insular, narrow-minded stand against another such equally insular and narrow minded position; what angered the orthodox parochial people who wanted to eliminate them, on the contrary, was the comprehensive liberal stand that they adopted and propagated. In order to understand this trend, one has to examine the tendency to vertically divide as rationalists or a rationalist tradition on one side and non-rationalists on the other while trying to understand the vast nature of Bharateeya Rationalism. This kind of division only helps the traditionalists. The vertical divider is of course erected by the traditionalists themselves. It is therefore necessary to explore the fundamental nature of the broad Indian Rationalism as also the altercations as well as the give and take between rationalists and dogmatists/traditionalists.

The following three points will help us understand it. The first: The legacy of Indian rationalism is not restricted to India but has a worldwide dimension. Even prior to the rationalism enunciated by Ajit Keshkambal or Gautam Buddha there was regular exchange of thought and goods between the Greeks and Indians as well as between the Chinese and the Indians. The Indians borrowed Astrology and sculpture from the Greeks. Similarly the Indian Philosophy contributed to Greek philosophy and borrowed the theory of Atomism from the Greeks. In modern times, however, the process of bringing together the fundamental science of philosophy and Rationalism, science and culture and rationalism and sentiments as also separating them began on a large scale.

Science is then said to be value neutral i.e. independent of values, it does not discriminate between right and wrong or good and bad, it is also indifferent towards emotions and sentiments; but reason is considered part of philosophical thinking as well as emotions, sentiments and human art and culture; and in the same breath it is maintained that -reason should have priority over emotions and science should be accompanied by reason. This is a big predicament. It occurred because as science evolved in Europe in the modern times, it was accompanied by rationalism also, and the first war it had to fight with was the Christian Religion. Ironically Science, itself evolved within the Church. The Church therefore had to pronounce science to be autonomous later, as, it was not possible for the Church to call it secular. This concept later proved very helpful for the development of capitalism. Capitalism needs non-ethical ideas and views. In reality science cannot remain indifferent to ethics or devoid of any philosophy. When one considers the way science has progressed during the last two and a half centuries and especially the modern science of the 20th, the hidden fundamental philosophical principles and values become obvious which one has to extract out. Considering this fact, it has now become necessary to redefine the concepts of science, scientific outlook and rationalism and while doing so, we will have to stress the approach that is inclusive of human emotions sentiments and values. Such efforts are being made all over the world. In the Indian traditions too this tendency of thinking is always noticed. Of course one has to look for it rationally and with scientific outlook. For, traditions are contaminated with mysticism, casteism and male prejudice and bigotry. While achieving inclusivity, one has to be also cautious of the fact that science is affected by rationalism; culture affects

science and rationalism and they both affect culture. Thus culture is constantly under the pressure of this confrontation as well as give and take. Something creative can develop as a result. This is important, for, otherwise we may get stuck into our niche adopting a negative approach.

Culture that is part of our thought and deeds now needs to be minutely scrutinised. We are already at it; yet it needs to be properly examined also at cerebral level. Let us take the example of the Indian festivals. These festivals fulfil various human needs. One is human urge to rejoice festivity, second is the material component related to the cycle of agricultural produce, the third is faith and rituals and the fourth is the need of an outlet for the human creativity, excitement and enthusiasm. Taking these aspects of festivals into consideration one should refrain from outright condemnation of the festivals and think how to remove the mystic, constrained and unwise - also exploitative - portion of it. Or else we will have to find rational alternatives for them. We should be concerned with all this and it should be the main objective of our care, contemplation and action. For example, the position 'ANiS' adopted to stop throwing Purnpoli into the Holi Fire and also discontinue the traditional immersion of Ganesh idols into water polluting the water resources. Similarly 'Bharat Dnyan Vidnyan' adopted a stand 'Books instead of Crackers' in order to see how the harmful unnecessary, polluting and irrational part of 'Diwali Celebrations' can be discontinued helping people to enjoy much more the remaining lot of it.

We need in short to start discriminating, observing minutely and thinking profoundly. We need to go beyond simply emphasizing the difference between Reason and Unreason. What we need is a fresh outlook on religion. The stand taken by Mahatma Phule, Nyayamoorti Ranade, Mahatma Gandhi, V. R. Shinde, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Pandit Nehru and Bhagat Singh regarding religion needs to be minutely appraised. To divide vertically into categories as Fanatics, irrational religionists and secularists is neither reasonable enough nor scientific. While considering the socio-cultural life on a vast scale, it is necessary to reach beyond these divisions.

Religion can be divided into 4/5 streams. Those belonging to the first stream are religious, believers or 'Sanatani' (Orthodox) as Gandhiji called them. (They, of course, are not the 'Sanatan Prabhat' type.) They respect ancient, orthodox values. They are religious revivalist. The second stream consists of religious reformers and propagators of new religion. The religion they propagate may be 'Sarvajanic Satyadharma' of Mahatma Phule or 'Navabuddha Dharma' of Babasaheb Ambedkar. Although these two are not popular in India today, they may become prominent tomorrow. They are Liberation Theology as is witnessed in Latin America. Pope Francis occasionally uses their idiom. It means liberating, confronting or reforming society with the help of religion. The third stream is of secular, non-religionists, atheists or Humanists going beyond religion. They are not just atheist but they go beyond atheism and claim that they are humanist who want to enhance the values stipulated by religion. In the fourth stream are religious fanatics, terrorists and extremists. It is extremely necessary to take a firm stand against their leaders and their bases. Yet many among them need awakening of their reason. But the crux of the problem is how to establish contact with them. The latest example is the four youth who were trying to escape from here and join the ISIS but were arrested by the Mumbai police.

It is extremely important to establish communication with such youths, of any religion, who are turning towards fanatic organizations and reform them awakening their reason. This cannot be achieved

through force. But it is evident that the police are not able to find and arrest them as they have not yet found the killers of Dr. Dabholkar and Comrade Pansare. They should instead wean away these wayward youth through dialogue from their chosen path of violence in the name of religion. In an advanced society the function of the police should be not just maintaining law and order but to act as a guides and counselors. Social organizations too ought to address this problem.

Crores of people belong to the first three streams and they offer tremendous scope for social reformers. The social reformers should try to relate to these crores of people, teach them to use their own faculty of discretion, find which paths in religiosity can lead them to reason, and also befriend all organizations and movements that are engaged in awakening reason. How to lead these misled youth more and more towards secularism and rationalism should be our constant concern and endeavour. Many doubt whether we should dream big in such dire state of affairs prevalent today. A long period where the small dreams of the toiling masses, and of the common people making a big dream and realising that big dream with the help of rational and scientific outlook is just round the corner when reason and scientific outlook will be awakened, our culture will progress and advance and our dreams will materialize.

*Translated by Ms Suman Oak*



## **Be an Enlightened Hindu:**

History of Hinduism is hidden in the Sacred Texts

*Keshav Shet Revankar*

The other day when pope held an all-religion meeting at the site of 9/11 Monument in New York City. A young Hindu woman uttered the following ancient Sūtra: *Asato Ma Sat Gamaya, Tamaso Ma Jyotir Gamaya, Mrityor Ma Amritam Gamaya*. She interpreted this Sutra *literally* and *inanely* like everyone in India does, including great Sanskrit scholars, Swamis and Gurus, as follows: *Lead me from untruth to truth, ignorance to knowledge, and death to immortality*.

Unfortunately, such *literal interpretation* of ancient sayings is the rule rather than exception, as no one in India had thus far taken pains to do research on their historical context.

This is a classic example of how not only *knowledge* but also *ignorance* is passed on from generation to generation, and Hindus simply utter them parrot-like without knowing their true import.

*To understand a given Sūtra in any ancient scripture, we need to know the doctrine of the author, what the words he used in it meant to him, and what his intent was, and not what it means to us today.*

The story of the Upanishadic revolution to overthrow the corrupt Brāhmanism top to bottom is encrypted in this single Sutra.

1. Upanishadists declared Brahma (Prakriti) as Asat (Unreal or Untrue), and declared Brahman as Sat (Real or True).

2. They declared the Gunas of Prakriti as evil, as they were the source of attachment to sense objects (money, power, people, etc.). This, they said, was the cause of ignorance (Tamas).
3. They declared the Law of Karma as evil, as it condemned one to be reborn on this miserable world, and thus perpetuated Samsāra.
4. They declared the Vedas as Avidyā (ignorance), and the Upanishads as enlightenment (Vidyā)
5. They declared that Yajnas and other Brāhmanic rituals were evil, as they earned one Karmaphalam. They declared Karmaphalam as evil, as they perpetuated Samsāra.
6. They declared Varna Dharma, based on Guna-Karma doctrine, was a sign of ignorance of the fact that the same Brahman was equally distributed in all classes, and hence all classes were equal.
7. They declared Brāhmins as vain and lying fools.

Having developed these anti-Brāhmanic doctrines, Upanishadists took up the role of the guardians of Sanātana Dharma. They were in no big hurry to overthrow decadent Brāhmanism. *They realized that fundamental changes require a methodical approach.*

So, they decided to recruit young children to indoctrinate them with the knowledge of Brahman/Atman and Yoga of detachment and Yoga of Nishkāma Karma so that they could wean them away from the ignorant ways of decadent Brāhmanism.

Carefully selected students seeking knowledge of Brahman moved into the home of the Upanishadic Guru, became part of *Guru Kula* (Guru's Family), and went through the *initiation ceremony* known as *Brahmopadesham* (indoctrination of knowledge of Brahman). The selected student sat very close to his Self-realized Guru so that he had eye-to-eye contact (*Upanayanam*) and repeated after the Guru the following request in the form of a Sūtra:

*Asato Ma Sat Gamaya*: Lead me from Brahma (*Asat*) of Brāhmanism to Brahman (*Sat*) of Upanishadism.

*Tamaso Ma Jyotir Gamaya*: Lead me from *ignorance* of Brahman engendered by the *Gunas of Prakriti* (due to attachment to material things) to *knowledge* of Brahman gained by *Yoga of detachment*.

*Mrityor Ma Amritam Gamaya*: Lead me from *Samsāra* (cycle of death, birth and death engendered by the *Law of Karma*) to *NirvāNa* (immortality) gained by renunciation of fruits of Karma.

Now that the Shishya (student) had uttered the *Sūtra* (*Asato Ma Sat Gamaya...*) the Guru put around his neck, over his shoulder and across his chest a Sūtra (Thread) as its symbol. This is why we know this ceremony as Thread Ceremony. Because this thread symbolizes new birth for the student, we call it *Janhnave* (a.k.a. *Janhnnuve*). In this compound word, *Janh* means being born, and *Nave* means new. Due to his two births, he was known as *Dvija* (twice born). Before the thread ceremony, he was said to be ignorant (*Tamas*); after it he was on the path to enlightenment (*Jyoti*).

After the Brahmopadesham ceremony, the Guru engaged his students in *confidential discourses* for several years and imparted to them knowledge of Brahman and Atman by means of simple experiments. He taught his students how Brahman pervaded the entire universe like a handful of salt

pervaded the water when it is dissolved in it; and how everything was contained in it. He explained to them how Brahman resided in the heart of all people as Atman, and that Brahman and Atman were one and the same (Self): *Tat Tvam Asi* (That thou art). One who realized Self became aware of the fact that he himself was Brahman: *Aham Brahmāsmi* (*I am Brahman*). Since Brahman had everything and desired nothing, one who gained knowledge of Brahman experiences *Bliss of Brahman*. Since Brahman was equally distributed in the hearts of all people, people of all classes were equal.

The Guru taught the Shishya the art of Yoga of detachment from material things (Sanyāsa) to gain knowledge of Brahman, and Yoga of desireless Karma (Nishkāma Karma, selfless action) as the means to end Samsāra.

Simultaneously the Guru downgraded every single aspect of Brāhmanism, as we read above.

It did not take long for Brāhmanic loyalists to recognize the mortal threat the Upanishads posed to the very existence of Brāhmanism. If the Upanishadic doctrines became popular, priestly class would become unemployed. There was no money to be made from Yoga! Loyalists decided to neutralize the Upanishads once and for all.

Now let us study what Brāhmanic loyalists did to the Upanishads to deal with the existential threat they posed to decadent Brāhmanism steeped in corrupt Yajnas. They decided to neutralize the Upanishads by *Brāhmanizing* it:

1. They declared the Upanishads as “culmination of the Vedic wisdom” and called them *Shruti* -that which is heard- orally transmitted scripture like the Vedas. Thus being declared sacred they came into the Brāhmanic domain. They could be *heard* only if a Brāhmin scribe chose to utter them. They attached them to the end part of ritual-obsessed Vedas and named them Vedānta.
2. They added enormous amount of pro-Veda, pro-Yajna, pro-rituals, pro-Varna Dharma, irrelevant esoteric and nonsensical verses, and scattered the Upanishadic doctrines in the texts. Now it took detectives with “eyes of wisdom” to identify them in the avalanche of verbiage. Unfortunately, there were no such people in India.
3. They declared the Vedas as *Karma Kānda* (Ritual Branch), and Vedānta as *Jnāna Kānda* (Spiritual Branch). However, they passed a *diktat* that to qualify to learn Jnāna Kānda one must first master Karma Kānda. They condemned those pursuing Jnāna Kānda alone to worse hell than the one Upanishadists condemned those indulging in Karma Kānda alone to.
4. They declared that both these scriptural branches led to knowledge of the Supreme and attainment of immortality. Karma Kānda led to immortality by being born again here on earth; and Jnāna Kānda led to immortality by not being born again here on earth.
5. They appointed their own Supreme God by the name of *Purusha* (Super Man) over Brahman and said that knowledge of Brahman was only the stepping-stone for knowledge of Purusha. They declared Purusha as the *True One*.

In the two verses below, the original Upanishadic sentences are shown in *italics* and the Brāhmanic additions are shown in underlined straight fonts.

Mundaka Up: 1:2: 12-13: *Let a BrāhmaNa, after he has examined all these worlds, which are gained by Yajnas, acquire freedom from all desires. Nothing that is eternal (Brahman) can be gained by what is not eternal (sacrifice of material things). Let him, in order to understand this, take fuel in hand and approach a Guru who is learned and dwells entirely in Brahman. That pupil who has approached him respectfully, whose thoughts are not troubled by any desire, and who has obtained perfect peace, the wise teacher truly told that knowledge of Brahman through which he knows the Eternal and True Purusha.*

6. To legitimize Purusha as the Supreme Lord, they inserted into Rig Veda a whole chapter called Purusha Sūkta. They demoted Brahman to the position of “Lord of immortality and divinity of Yajna.”

Purusha Sūkta: 2-3: *This Purusha is all that yet has been and all that is to be. Lord of immortality (Brahman) which waxes greater still by (sacrificial) food; so mighty is his greatness; yea, (however) greater than this is Purusha.*

7. They neutralized all anti-Brāhmanic Sūtras by attaching them to selfish Yajnas. For example, they attached the Upanishadic revolutionary Sūtra ‘*Asato ma Sat Gamaya*’ –Lead me from Prakriti to Brahman- to Pavamāna verses of Yajurveda uttered during selfish Yajna in which the ritualist attempts to reach Vedic gods (ascend to heaven), or become a god himself. Thus they succeeded in converting the ultimate Upanishadic Sūtra designed to overthrow decadent Brāhmanism indulging in selfish Yajnas into one designed to gain heaven by means of selfish Yajnas! Such was the brilliance of Brāhmins of ancient India.
8. They retained the Brahmapadesham ceremony as it was an important source of income for them; but they replaced the revolutionary Sūtra ‘*Asato ma Sat Gamaya*’ with Gāyatri Mantra: Rig Veda: 3:62:10:

*Tat Savitur VareNyam Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi DhiyoYo Nah Prachodayāt. (We meditate on the adorable glory of (sun god) Savitur. May he stimulate our intelligence.)*

This Mantra invoking Savitur, one of many minor Vedic sun god, *had absolutely nothing to do with gaining knowledge of Brahman.* Then they endlessly embellished this Mantra in the Vedānta texts, and declared it to be the most sacred of all Mantras of Brāhmanism even though it was just another of hundreds of similar Mantras of Rig Veda.

9. They continued to sacrifice animals and birds in Kāmya Karma promising dumb and greedy royals heaven after death and wealth and lordship in their next life, while collecting huge DakshiNa in the form of donation (Dana) for performing them.

Thus the original Upanishads disappeared completely, and the so-called Upanishads we have today are the *Vedānta*–texts that are the *end part* of the ritual-oriented Vedas. Brāhmanic loyalists wrote these down several centuries after Kshatriya intellectuals conceived their doctrines around 800 B.C. If you read the Vedānta texts, you will find that most of what is in them has absolutely nothing to do with



the true Upanishads. Most of the materials in them promote Yajnas, the Vedas and Brāhmanic rituals, the very things the original Upanishads wanted to eliminate.

In these texts the true Upanishadic doctrines are diluted and scattered haphazardly between voluminous esoteric nonsense added to the texts by many Brāhmanic scribes of varying intellectual capacities over the ensuing centuries with reckless disregard for the texts' integrity.

If the reader could not clearly distinguish Brāhmanic verses from the Upanishadic ones, these texts would appear to him as just a jumble of words and sentences with little coherence and making little sense.

So the texts are not only bewildering but also highly self-contradictory. Whereas one Upanishadic sentence degrades the Vedas as inferior knowledge, another Brāhmanic sentence declares the Vedas as supreme knowledge. One sentence condemns Yajnas as evil, and another praises it as sublime. One declares Brahman as the Supreme, the other declares Purusha as the Supreme. Some scribes were so ignorant of the fundamental doctrines of the Upanishads that what they wrote was utter nonsense.

By the time the latter day Brāhmanic scribes wrote them down, they had no clue as to the true intent of the original Upanishadic authors several centuries earlier, nor did they know the true spirit of the Upanishads. For example, in the BrihadāraNyaka Upanishad, the Brāhmanic scribe recorded the very ancient Upanishadic Sūtra 'Asato Ma Sat Gamaya,' but he could not explain its hidden meaning. So he wrote that all three lines must mean exactly the same thing: 'Lead me from death to immortality.' He wrote that the words Asat and Tamas meant death! Finally he admitted that the real meaning of this Sūtra was hidden, that is, he did not know what its true meaning was.

Besides all this, successive generations of scribes recklessly added whatever ignorant idea they thought fit to add to these texts.

Al-Biruni (C.1030 A.D.): *"Indian scribes are careless, and do not take the pains to produce correct and well-collated copies. In consequence, the highest results of the author's mental development are lost by their negligence, and his book becomes already in the first or second copy so full of faults that the text appears as something entirely new, which neither a scholar nor one familiar with the subject, whether Hindu or Muslim, could any longer understand. It will sufficiently illustrate the matter if we tell the reader that we have sometimes written down a word from the mouth of Hindus, taking the greatest pains to fix its pronunciation, and afterwards when we repeated it to them, they had great difficulty in recognizing it."*

To complicate matters even further, if that is possible, as Al-Biruni noted one thousand years ago, Indian scribes were careless in making handwritten copies, and so a great deal of inaccuracies crept into the copies. Successive copies became more and more corrupted, just as photocopies of photocopies of photocopies of the original document progressively become less and less like it. The same word appears in different forms in different copies resulting in different interpretations by different commentators.

Not knowing that these texts were the battlegrounds on which Brāhmanic loyalist and Upanishadic sages fought each other, both Max Mueller (who translated them) and Shankarāchārya (who wrote long-winded commentaries) were puzzled by the inherent inconsistencies and contradictions in these texts.

The question might arise: If this were the case, how do we know what the original Upanishadic doctrines were? Well, luckily, we can find them relatively well preserved in the Bhagavad Gita-Upanishad (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.). This time around Upanishadists made sure that they could not be gotten rid of by taking two measures:

- They inserted it into Arjuna Vishāda Gita, which, being part of Mahābhārata was Smṛiti (remembered scripture). Once it was in the public domain it could not be converted into Shruti (scriptures in the domain of Brāhmins).
- They made all Upanishadic shlokas come out of Lord Krishna's mouth. Thus no one dared to destroy them.

So, to those who know the history of Brāhmanism and are able to clearly distinguish Brāhmanic doctrines (the Gunas of Prakṛiti and the Law of Karma) from the opposing Upanishadic doctrines (Brahman/Atman and Yoga) the Bhagavad Gita is the *Rosetta Stone* of Hinduism's scriptures, by which one could decipher the secret codes and Sūtras of any Hindu scripture.

Unfortunately, none of the great Acharyas made this distinction, as none of them knew the history of Brāhmanism's decay and the Upanishadic revolution to overthrow it. They all believed that the true Upanishads and the Vedas were one and the same, and there was no conflict between them whatsoever even though scriptures are full of clear-cut evidence to the contrary:

BG: 13:34: *Those that perceive with the eye of wisdom this distinction between Prakṛiti (Brahmanism's supreme divinity) and Brahman/Atman, (Upanishadism's supreme divinity) and deliverance of beings from Prakṛiti, go to the Supreme (attain knowledge of Brahman).*

When a commentator, indulging in massive *denial*, or out of *ignorance*, believes two *diametrically opposite* doctrines as one and the same, he would be forced to resort to fanciful imagination to explain glaring contradictions in them. Naturally his commentary is likely to be absolute gobbledygook. This, in fact, is the case with every single commentary on the Vedānta texts as well as the Bhagavad Gita-Upanishad.

By 400 B.C. Brāhmanism had completely neutralized the Upanishads. It was in this murky period of India's ancient history that Buddhism, Jainism, Ajīvika, Lokāyata (Materialism) and many other heterodox Dharmas flourished like lotuses in the cesspool, and more and more people began to abandon Brāhmanism to join these heterodox Dharmas.

Royal houses also began to patronize them. Around 297 B.C. Chandragupta Maurya abandoned Brāhmanism, became a Jain monk and abdicated his throne. His son Bindusāra (ruled 297-272 B.C.) abandoned Brāhmanism, embraced Ajīvika sect. His son Ashoka the Great (ruled 272-232 B.C.), after a bloody war in Kalinga (261 B.C.), abandoned Brāhmanism, and became an ardent Buddhist.

Encouraged by Ashoka thousands upon thousands of people including disillusioned Brāhmins and Kshatriyas abandoned Brāhmanism and joined Buddhism as Bhikkus. By 250 B.C. Brāhmanism was practically on deathbed. Now the stage is set for the beginning of the Bhagavad Gita.

*Concluded*

[keshavashet@yahoo.com](mailto:keshavashet@yahoo.com)



## Pale Blue Dot

Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there--on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds.

Our posturing, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.

The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.

It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.

*Carl Sagan*

Courtesy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b58SfRphkKc>

An Official Journal of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee, India

# THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build Rationalist Society

Issue - 3



Vol - 16

Oct – Dec 2016

## *In this issue...*

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 2. Darkness at Dawn                              | <i>Anosh Malekar</i>          |
| 17. A Brahmin's Cow Tales                        | <i>Sheela Reddy</i>           |
| 19. Reason To Think                              | <i>Kaushik Basu</i>           |
| 21. The Shaman-Shyster:                          | <i>Shantanu Guha Ray</i>      |
| 23. Monk, in nude, talks ... in Haryana Assembly | <i>Khushboo Sandhu</i>        |
| 25. Furore Over Sermon for MLAs                  | <i>Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar</i> |
| 27. The Present Status of Investigation          | <i>Prabhakar Nanawaty</i>     |
| 31. A Critic's Lonely Quest                      | <i>Kai Schultz</i>            |
| 34. Mommie Dearest .                             | <i>Christopher Hitchens</i>   |
| 36. Weaning People off Religious Belief          | <i>Michael Shermer</i>        |
| 38. State must not organize Religious festivals  | <i>Ram Puniyani</i>           |

**Founder**  
**Dr. Narendra Dabholkar**  
**(1945-2013)**

**Editors:**  
P.K. Nanawaty  
Ms Suman Oak

[pkn.ans@gmail.com](mailto:pkn.ans@gmail.com)

[www.thoughtnaction.co.in](http://www.thoughtnaction.co.in)

## Darkness at Dawn

*Anosh Malekar*

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar was in a chatty mood on the evening of 18 August 2013. The 67-year-old rationalist had delivered a lecture against superstition in the town of Rahimatpur, in Maharashtra's Satara district, and was returning in a car to his home in Satara city, about a half-hour drive away. On the way, Dabholkar held forth on "the benefits of a healthy diet, regular exercise and time management, to help one live longer," recounted Shivaji Raut, an old friend and right-to-information campaigner, who was with him on the journey.

Though he arrived home quite late, Dabholkar rose early the next morning to catch a 6 am bus to Pune. He generally spent the first two days of each week in the city, where he oversaw the work of the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (Maharashtra Blind Faith Eradication Committee), also known by the acronym MANS, an organisation he founded in 1989. While in Pune, Dabholkar would also wrap up work on the latest issue of *Sadhana*, a 68-year-old weekly that he had edited for 15 years.

Dabholkar reached Pune at around half past nine, but before he could attend to his work, he was called away to Mumbai "at short notice to participate in a television debate on caste panchayats," Vinod Shirsath, a Pune-based journalist who was then *Sadhana*'s executive editor, told me. By the time Dabholkar returned, it was past midnight, and he retired to a flat that belonged to the trust that ran *Sadhana*. He had called a press conference the following day, at which he was to speak about the need to use eco-friendly idols, instead of plaster ones, for immersion in ponds, lakes and rivers during the upcoming Ganapati festival.

Dabholkar woke up on the morning of 20 August, put on a simple violet khadi shirt and light cotton trousers, and stepped out of the flat for a walk. He walked roughly a kilometre till he came to the Omkareshwar bridge, which spans the Mutha river and connects the Omkareshwar temple on one bank to the popular Bal Gandharva auditorium on the other. Dabholkar began to cross the bridge from the temple end.

Two men had been skulking around the area, waiting for him. The activist had walked less than half the length of the bridge when the men approached him and started firing at him. One bullet slammed into his temple, above his right eye, and entered his skull. Another cut through his neck and lodged in his chest. The third grazed his abdomen. Dabholkar slumped face down to the ground, as blood gushed out of his wounds. The shooters darted away, jumped onto a motorcycle parked nearby, and sped off into one of the tiny lanes that wind through the old city.

Dabholkar's son, Hamid, who was in Satara, received a call from a policeman at around 8.30 that morning, informing him of what had happened. He called Shirsath immediately, and told him that Dabholkar had been "shot and admitted to Sassoon Hospital." He added: "You please rush, I'm leaving too." But Dabholkar had died as soon as he was shot.

Later that same day, the activist's body was transported to Satara. Thousands streamed to his house to pay their final respects—including the then chief minister of Maharashtra, Prithviraj Chavan, and the state's home minister, RR Patil. Raut recounted that many of the mourners were deep in shock, and that a silence hung heavy over the house.

But not everyone present that day remained subdued. Raut remembered that “the silence was broken by comrade Govind Pansare's arrival late evening from Kolhapur.” The 81-year-old Pansare, also a rationalist, and a member of the Communist Party of India, was not formally Dabholkar's colleague—but as two public figures with similar ideologies, they were well acquainted with and supported each other's work. When he arrived, Raut said, Pansare stood beside Dabholkar's body and shouted slogans condemning the murder. He was vocal in the media, too. The *Times of India* quoted him the next day as saying, “Dabholkar's assassination is an indicator that there're fundamentalists and fascists among us who want to quell all rational voices with violence.”

Pansare was voicing a widespread fear: that violent Hindu groups were growing in prominence, and muzzling free speech in a region with a long-standing tradition of progressive politics and thought. In the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, western Maharashtra saw the birth of movements such as Jotirao Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj, dedicated to fighting caste discrimination; and the the Prati Sarkar, an anti-imperial peasant uprising, whose participants also carried out elaborate social programmes. Dabholkar was in many ways an inheritor of this tradition, but, as he attempted to promote rationalist thought, he faced continuous opposition, often in the form of overt threats. Some of these threats came from Hindu groups, most notably the Goa-based Sanatan Sanstha—which has, since the killing, come under intense scrutiny from investigating agencies.

Pansare's statement to the *Times of India* proved prophetic. A year and a half later, on the morning of 16 February 2015, he, too, was shot, near his home in Kolhapur; he died four days later. On the morning of 30 August that year, a few hundred kilometres to south, in the city of Dharwad in Karnataka, another rationalist, the scholar MM Kalburgi, who formerly served as the vice chancellor of the Kannada University in Hampi, was shot and killed in his home. Kalburgi, too, had drawn the ire of Hindu groups for speaking against superstition and idol worship. The three murders, for which no one has yet been convicted, cast a chill over the entire region, and the country, as other outspoken activists wondered if they should lower their voices.

One of the most puzzling aspects of the investigations into the three rationalists' murders has been the ballistic analyses provided by two forensic science laboratories—one in Mumbai, and the other in Bengaluru. Just a few hours after Dabholkar was killed, two men, Manish Nagori and Vikas Khandelwal, were arrested in Navi Mumbai in connection with another case, having to do with extortion. Maharashtra's anti-terrorism squad, or ATS, later handed them over to the Pune police for their suspected involvement in yet another case—the 2012 murder of a security guard at the

University of Pune. In November 2013, the Mumbai laboratory submitted a ballistics report to the state's then home minister, RR Patil, that linked Nagori and Khandelwal to Dabholkar's murder, claiming that a firearm seized from them may have been used in it.

A little over two years later, in February 2016, this finding became mired in confusion after media reports emerged about new information from the Mumbai and Bengaluru laboratories. Anil Singh, an additional solicitor general appearing for the Central Bureau of Investigation, or CBI, told the Bombay High Court that while the Mumbai laboratory claimed that the same weapon was used in all three murders, the Bengaluru laboratory claimed that they involved different weapons. The agency sought additional time to consult other organisations, including Scotland Yard, before arriving at a conclusion.

Since the Mumbai laboratory had not officially withdrawn its first report, linking Nagori, Khandelwal and their weapon to Dabholkar's killing, it was unclear whether the laboratory stood by that first finding. But the media did not raise this inconsistency, and instead shifted its focus away from Nagori and Khandelwal, and the first ballistic report, to the contradictions between the Bengaluru and Mumbai laboratories' findings.

On 30 September last year, I went unannounced to the Mumbai forensic science laboratory. To my surprise—and, indeed, confusion—a ballistics expert I met, who had knowledge of the first report, reiterated the 2013 findings. He claimed that the empty shells recovered from the Dabholkar crime scene had been matched to a 7.65 millimetre country pistol seized from Nagori and Khandelwal. He insisted that “the markings on the empty shells tested by us matched with the recovered weapon.”

Even if the contradiction between the Bengaluru and Mumbai laboratories' claims can be put down to a difference of professional opinion, the Mumbai laboratory's 2016 claim was difficult to reconcile with its own 2013 assertion. Nagori and Khandelwal were let off in the Dabholkar case in April 2014 on a technicality—that the police did not file a charge sheet against them within 90 days of their arrest, as required by law. But how, I wondered, could a weapon seized from the two men in 2013 have been used in Pansare and Kalburgi's murders in 2015?

On the day Dabholkar was murdered, after the news had broken, the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, or HJS, a group affiliated to the Sanatan Sanstha, uploaded onto its website a photograph of the activist with a red “X” over his face. The move drew sharp criticism, and the cybercrime cell of the Pune police directed the HJS to take the image down. The matter ended there.

The Sanstha had long kept up an attack against Dabholkar, disrupting his public meetings, criticising him in its publications and on its websites, and terming him a “*Hindudrohi*,” or traitor to Hindus. But this image echoed the many anonymous threats that Dabholkar received while he was alive. Perhaps the last of these read, “Remember Gandhi. Remember what we did to him”—a threat that his family told me he received often, sometimes even at public functions. Dabholkar chose to ignore these warnings, and declined police protection.

A day after Dabholkar's death, the Sanstha published a statement by its founder, Jayant Athavale, on the front page of its website. It read, "Births and deaths are pre-destined and everybody gets the fruit of their karma. Instead of dying bedridden through illness, or after some surgery, such a death for Dabholkar is a blessing of the Almighty." Athavale added that though "Dabholkar was an atheist and did not believe in god, the same god would give solace to the departed soul."

These sinister remarks were widely reported, and left many speculating about possible links between the organisation and the murder. The Sanstha was already suspected to have had a hand in several acts of violence. In 2008, several of its "seekers" were arrested in connection with explosions of crude bombs that had taken place that year. Two blasts occurred at auditoriums—in Navi Mumbai and Thane—that were staging the play *Amhi Pachpute*, which the HJS claimed hurt Hindu sentiments; and one blast took place at a movie theatre in Panvel that was screening the Bollywood film *Jodhaa Akbar*, which the organisation claimed showed a Hindu woman in a poor light. Two Sanstha members—Vikram Bhawe and Ramesh Gadkari—were convicted for the first two blasts, and sentenced to ten years in prison. But the Bombay High Court later granted them bail and suspended their punishment—their appeals are pending before the court. The Sanstha denied having any role in the incidents, and claimed that the arrested men had been acting independently.

But the Sanstha's discourse suggested that it had a tendency towards violence. In a July 2008 article titled 'Spiritual as Criminal?' for the website Countercurrents, the journalist Subhash Gatade wrote that while most of the organisation's texts deal with purportedly spiritual subjects, "a very important text in the training of the seekers is 'Texts on Defence.'" Through it, Gatade pointed out, Sanstha seekers were "imparted training with air rifles." He also cited several instances in which Sanstha texts appeared to condone violence. Athavale, for instance, wrote in his book *Science and Spirituality*, "Destroy evildoers if you have been advised by saints or Gurus to do so. Then these acts are not registered in your name."

A website that promotes Athavale's work describes him as a "psychiatrist and clinical hypnotherapist" from Mumbai, who discovered the limits of modern medicine when he saw that some of his own patients were cured only after they sought help from "a holy person or place." He founded the Sanstha in the neighbouring state of Goa in 1999, to, according to the group's website, "impart spiritual knowledge to the curious in the society." The organisation also sought to cultivate religious tendencies in people, and provide "personal guidance to seekers for their spiritual uplift." From 1985 onwards, Athavale, a slight, bespectacled man, dedicated himself to the spiritual realm, and, the site says, soon started showing signs of divinity—his hair reportedly began to turn golden in colour, and the Devanagari symbol for "Om" appeared on his fingernails, his tongue and parts of his skin.

Sanstha officials maintain that Athavale is no longer involved in the activities of the organisation. "Since year 2006, because of various ailments and old age, he has remained confined to His



room,” Abhay Vartak, a spokesperson, told me over email. “Therefore, all the activities of the Sanstha and management of various Ashrams are looked after by the seekers and trustees of Sanatan Sanstha.”

The organisation had drawn the suspicion of the state government several years ago. I obtained a copy of an April 2011 letter from the home ministry of the Maharashtra state government—then headed by a Congress and Nationalist Congress Party coalition—to the central home ministry—then headed by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance. The letter said, “You are informed that three cases are registered against activists of Sanatan Sanstha regarding Bomb Blasts. The arrested accused have taken encouragement, incitement, motivation, from the writings in Sanatan Prabhat”—the Sanstha’s official publication. Enclosing “a detailed report” on the blasts, the letter said, “this government has reached the conclusion that the aforesaid organisation is liable to be banned with its affiliated sister concerns/trusts.” But the request was never implemented, and the Sanstha remained active.

Also ineffective in curbing the Sanstha’s activities was a petition to the Bombay High Court by a group of families from Nashik, Pune, Osmanabad and Ahmednagar districts. The petitioners complained that young female members of their families had abandoned them and joined Sanstha ashrams. One submission said that the Sanstha, “for achieving their goal of Ishwari Rajya,” or a divine kingdom, published material that “directs, canvasses its members to overthrow the system established as per Constitution of India, 1950.” The petitioners contended that this amounted to “waging a war against the Indian state,” and asked the court to declare the Sanatan Sanstha a terrorist organisation, and ban it.

At the end of November 2013, a few months after Dabholkar’s murder, his family met the Maharashtra politician Sushil Kumar Shinde, then the UPA government’s home minister, to also seek a ban on the organisation. When I met Shinde at his home in Mumbai on 30 September last year, he refused to accept responsibility in the matter, saying, “Yes, I met them. But we were voted out.”

As investigations into the murders of Dabholkar and Pansare have progressed, disturbing links appear to have emerged between the organisation and the killings. On 16 September 2015, a special investigation team of the Maharashtra police arrested a seeker named Sameer Gaikwad in Sangli on suspicion of his involvement in Pansare’s death. And on 10 June this year, the CBI arrested another seeker, a Panvel-based doctor named Virendra Tawade, on suspicion of his role in Dabholkar’s killing.

Rather than retreat in the face of such scrutiny, the Sanstha has gone on the offensive. On 23 September 2015, a battery of 31 lawyers, led by Sanjiv Punalekar, who is associated with a group known as the Hindu Vidhidnya Parishad, appeared to defend Gaikwad when the SIT presented him before a Kolhapur magistrate to seek his custody. In his email, Abhay Vartak, too, supported Gaikwad, claiming that the police was “struggling to find evidence” against him. He insisted that

“Sameer is innocent and the so called investigation is a conspiracy.” He described Tawade’s arrest, too, as a conspiracy, and said that it had “only delayed Sameer’s release on bail; else he would have been out of jail by now.”

In a brief report on 7 October 2015, accompanied by a photograph, *Sanatan Prabhat* announced that 30 people, including Shiv Sena and Bajrang Dal activists, had met at Omkareshwar temple three days earlier to pledge their support for the Sanstha. The groups pledged to “co-operate” and “communicate Sanatan’s true position to the people, through social media,” it said. Dabholkar’s son Hamid, who was alerted to the report by an email, was astonished that the group—organised under the banner of the HJS—could meet so brazenly, just metres from the spot where Dabholkar was murdered.

Meanwhile, the Sanstha continues to spew violent rhetoric. The September edition of *Sanatan Prabhat* carried a press release from the HJS on the hanging of Yakub Memon, convicted in the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts. The release called for stricter action against “anti-national” elements. Citing a seventeenth-century saint and spiritual poet especially revered in his home district of Satara, the release said that, according to “Samartha Ramdas Swami’s teaching, anti-nationals are like dogs, they must be killed.”

I asked Vartak about the Sanstha’s relationship to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or RSS, which has been the subject of some speculation. In his email, he said, “The spread of activities of the RSS has been phenomenal; however, they lack spiritual base. Sanatan Sanstha is trying to provide the missing link. End of the day, RSS and Sanatan Sanstha are organisations that are closely associated with Hindutva; needless to say that there could be some common threads.”

In September 2015, after hearing petitions filed by the families of Dabholkar and Pansare, the Bombay High Court expressed concern over the investigations into their cases—the former’s by the CBI and the latter’s by a special investigation team, or SIT. The court criticised both for their failure to make progress. “It is a disturbing factor,” said the bench of Justices Ranjit More and Rajesh Ketkar.

After this, the investigations appeared to pick up pace. A week after the court began hearing the petitions, the SIT arrested Gaikwad in connection with the Pansare murder. This was the first major breakthrough in the nearly seven months since the crime.

Other names, too, began to emerge. In the second week of October, a senior police officer in Kolhapur told me that the police had vital clues to Gaikwad’s close links to a man named Rudra Patil, a seeker from Sangli. Patil was also wanted in a 2009 case regarding a bomb blast in Madgaon, Goa, in which two seekers died while ferrying explosives on a scooter. He had been absconding ever since. The officer added that another absconder in the same case, a man named Sarang Akolkar, was also under investigation for links to the murders. Patil, who had studied in Kolhapur, was suspected to be involved in Pansare’s murder, the officer said. Akolkar, who was from Pune, was being investigated for his possible involvement in Dabholkar’s killing.

Arguing the case on 7 October, the two families' lawyer, Abhay Nevagi, told the high court that investigating agencies had failed in their duty to nab Patil, even though they had issued a "red notice" to Interpol, the international policing agency, seeking his arrest. "Look at the way the agencies are operating," he said. "He is absconding for six years."

Nevagi also pointed out that Patil's wife, Priti, was the lawyer representing Gaikwad in Kolhapur, effectively suggesting that the agency was not thoroughly probing potential links between suspects. In its comments, the court, which had read confidential reports on the progress of the investigations, concurred with the families on the question of Patil's importance, and curtly criticised the agencies' work. "The report is silent on steps taken to nab Rudra Patil," Justice More said. "There is no doubt of some link."

Two months later, on 14 December, the SIT filed a 372-page charge sheet against Gaikwad in a Kolhapur court. The document contained the statements of 77 witnesses, including that of the 14-year-old boy who was present at the scene of Pansare's murder, and who had identified Gaikwad.

But the investigation seemed to stall again after this; no major developments were announced for several months. In April 2016, the court took the agencies to task again. "How many more murder anniversaries and status reports must one wait for before any concrete leads can be obtained in the two cases?" a bench of Justices SC Dharmadhikari and Shalini Phansalkar-Joshi said. On 3 May, the court told the agencies to "exhibit more promptness and expediency in completing the investigations, or at least making real progress," and assured them that "as long as matters are before this Court, no hurdles and obstacles can be placed" before the investigations.

For the first time, the court also took note of potential links to the Sanstha, orally instructing investigating agencies to question its members. In January this year, I attended a media briefing by the special public prosecutor in the case, Harshad Nimbalkar, soon after his appointment. Nimbalkar said that there was strong evidence of the Sanstha's involvement. The charge sheet against Gaikwad, he said, detailed a long history of enmity between Pansare and the organisation. "A civil and other criminal cases were filed by the Sanstha against Pansare in Goa," he said. "It had also complained to the bar council of Maharashtra and Goa against his activism. This showed that the organisation stood to benefit directly from his murder." Nimbalkar added, "Right now, our aim is to not give any scope for Gaikwad to get bail. We will tell the court that the investigation is still on and that he may flee, like his aide Rudra Patil."

But the Sanstha's spokesperson, Vartak, insisted that the seekers were "innocent and are being made the scapegoat." The organisation's lawyer, Punalekar, also told me over the phone that it was being dragged unfairly into the case.

On 29 December 2015, the Kolhapur police received an oddly ominous letter from Punalekar, in which he said that witnesses in the Pansare case could be in danger. "Western Maharashtra is infamous for criminal activities and there are chances that the witness may be the target of those

who want to malign the image of the Sanatan Sanstha,” he wrote. When I spoke to him, Punalekar said his letter was not intended as a threat. “My intention was simple, and as stated, to ensure protection for the witness,” he said. Punalekar pointed an accusatory finger at the police instead. “But what was the intention of the Kolhapur police, who selectively leaked its contents to the media?” he said. “All this was being done to somehow implicate the Sanstha and its associate organisations.”

The Dabholkar case returned to the headlines on 10 June this year after the CBI arrested Virendra Tawade, a surgeon based in Panvel, and a member of the HJS. The 48-year-old Tawade, who is originally from the coastal town of Devgad, had spent six years in Kolhapur before he moved to Satara sometime around 2006. He worked with various hospitals for two years, during which time he also led the Sanstha’s attempts to hound Dabholkar by disrupting his anti-superstition public meetings or pressurising authorities to halt them. He was produced in court on 11 June. The CBI, citing his emails, call records, and a hard disk recovered from his house, said that he had received instructions from an unidentified source to “focus on Dabholkar” three months before the murder. The same day, media reports appeared, quoting CBI sources saying that Tawade could be a key conspirator, and may have arranged a weapon and bullets for the crime.

A senior CBI officer involved in the case told me that Tawade had been in touch with Akolkar, and had undergone arms training in the village of Karajnagi in Jath taluka, in Sangli. The officer said that this was the native village of Rudra Patil, and of his cousin, Malgonda—one of the two men who died in the Goa blast.

While Tawade’s arrest seemed like a breakthrough, in mid June the *Mumbai Mirror* and the *Times of India* published a sensational story of a statement made to the CBI by a key witness in the presence of a magistrate, which severely dented the agencies’ claims that they were conducting an effective investigation. The witness, a Kolhapur resident, said he had worked with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal and the Sanatan Sanstha, but was not a formal part of any organisation. By his account, “around 2013,” Tawade approached him, and asked him for help in manufacturing a revolver, procuring bullets, and sheltering two men. The witness said he wriggled out of the requests. “On August 20, 2013, I heard about Dr Narendra Dabholkar being shot dead and my mind went over my entire interaction with Dr Tawade,” the *Mumbai Mirror* report said. “He and others in his group knew of Dr Dabholkar’s exact whereabouts. I called my policeman friend and asked him to get in touch with any senior officer and to please fix an appointment for me. I also told him that I wanted him to share my apprehensions with his seniors.”

The witness said he met senior police officials in Kolhapur, and later an officer of the ATS. He claimed that he told the ATS officer that he “would be willing to testify in court if required,” and that the officer “said OK but did nothing about it.” The *Mumbai Mirror* report quotes him as saying that, a year and a half later, “on February 2015, Govind Pansare was shot dead.”

The report continued with the witness’s account. “Within hours of the attack on Pansare, a police officer from Rajarampuri division of Kolhapur contacted me,” the man reportedly said. He claimed

that he, once again, told the police everything he knew, but that, “once again, nothing happened.” It was only in January 2016 that the CBI approached him, and made him a witness in the Dabholkar case.

In an editorial titled ‘A “Tolerant” State’ published on 18 June 2016, the *Economic and Political Weekly* observed, “While Dabholkar, Pansare and MM Kalburgi’s murders (as well as the harassment meted out to others like them) are deplorable, what is even more despicable is the silence of large sections of the population and the continuing support of political interests to their tormentors.” The absence of a proper government response, the editorial argued, “is a clear indication that citizens feel they are not safe if they speak out against entrenched religious vested interests and that the state will not take their complaints seriously.” It warned that a society “that cannot tolerate dissenting views or keeps quiet in the face of a violent reaction to such views, is staring at a cultural and intellectual abyss.”

(Excerpts from the Article published in Caravan, August 2016)

<http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reportage/darkness-dawn-dabholkar-pansare-kalburgi>

Courtesy: Caravan

■■■

## Third death anniversary of Dr. Narendra Dabholkar Response by Press

### ***Times News Network***

#### **MANS to hold march to mark Dabholkar's death anniversary**

PUNE: Members of the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmulan Samiti would gather at 7am on Saturday at the Vitthal Ramji Shinde bridge to condemn the killing of rationalist Narendra Dabholkar.

Dabholkar was shot dead by unidentified assailants on August 20, 2013, while he was on his morning walk on the bridge.

The CBI, which is investigating the case, is yet to make any progress in the investigations barring the arrest of Virendrasinh Tawde, an ENT doctor and member of Sanatan Sanstha, earlier in June this year.

Social leaders N D Patil, Baba Adhav, Nagraj Manjule, Ajit Abhyankar, Mukta Manohar, Prakash Ambedkar, Vidya Bal, Subhash Ware, Rajiya Patel and Shamshuddin Tamboli are expected to be at the gathering.

Inspirational songs written by Narendra Dabholkar are expected to be sung.

A protest march would be taken out at 10am from the bridge and will culminate at Sane Guruji memorial on Sinhagad Road, after passing through Shaniwarwada, Shivaji Road, Laxmi Road, Alka chowk, and Dandekar bridge.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/MANS-to-hold-march-to-mark-Dabholkars-death-anniversary/articleshow/53779281.cms>

### ***Indian Express:***

#### **Narendra Dabholkar murder case: Sanatan Sanstha marches carrying pictures of murder accused**

Blatant disregard of the law, says Dabholkar's son Hamid; Sanatan Sanstha dismisses charges.

Pro-Hindutva outfit Sanatan Sanstha on Saturday took out a "protest march" holding aloft pictures of individuals facing either terror or murder charges who were associated with the organisation. The protest march followed the route on which Andhrashaddha Nirmoolan Samiti had taken out a padyatra earlier in the day to mark the third death anniversary of Dr Narendra Dabholkar.

The police, which apparently remained spectators, said in the evening they were examining the "legality" in this case. While the Dabholkar family alleged that the Sanatan act showed brazen disregard for the law of land, Sanatan said they wanted to send out a message that "innocent" people were being framed and arrested for crimes they never committed.

"It is completely shocking that they (Sanatan) can carry out such acts in broad daylight once again... We want to know from the police whether carrying pictures of people facing serious offences is allowed, whether they support this kind of public show of support for those under arrest," asked Hamid Dabholkar, son of the slain anti-superstition activist Narendra Dabholkar.

"We don't know what the government headed by Devendra Fadnavis, who is also the state's Home Minister, has to say on this. Is such glorification of people involved in criminal and terror acts allowed? Is the CM in favour of such acts in Maharashtra... the CM should tell the people of the state, his government should clarify its stand," he said.

Hamid said they took out a padyatra from the same spot on the Vithal Ramji Shinde bridge where his father was shot on August 20, 2013. "The rally ended at Sanaji Guruji Samarak. After our rally ended, they (Sanatan) took out a protest march apparently on the same route," he said. The rally by the Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti was attended by over a thousand people, which included prominent personalities like Prakash Ambedkar, Baba Adhav, Vidya Bal, Bhai Vaidya, Shamsuddin Tamboli, Manisha Gupte, Ashok Dhivire, Nagraj Manjule and Subhash Ware.

The Sanatan Sanstha said they had done nothing wrong. “Our objective was to protest against the wrongful arrests of individuals... Even after 72 days, the CBI has not been able to produce even any evidence against Dr Virendra Tawde arrested in connection with Dabholkar’s murder case... Similarly, no trial has been conducted despite charge sheet having being filed against Sameer Gaikwad in the Govind Pansare murder case in Kolhapur. The Pansare family has succeeded in getting the trial postponed by raising various demands,” said Abhay Vartak, spokesperson for Sanatan Sanstha.

He said that in the Sadhvi Pragya Singh case too, the National Investigation Agency had given her a clean chit. “Yet, she is not being released from the jail... we want to know why ? That’s why we were protesting,” he said. On carrying pictures of Lt Col Shrikant Purohit, accused in the Malegaon blast case, and Dhananjay Desai, accused in the murder case of techie Mohsin Shaikh, Vartak said they too were framed for acts which they never committed. “Hence, we were protesting seeking justice for them,” he said.

Vartak, however, denied they carried out their protest march on the same route on which ANS took out its rally. “But some routes could have been similar given the same area in which the marches were taken out,” he said. Vartak said the anti-superstition activists have been demanding a ban on Sanatan Sanstha and Sanstha now wants a ban on the Andhshradha Nirmoolan Samiti and the Privartan Trust. “These organisations have foreign funding. That’s why the government should investigate their acts and initiate appropriate action like imposing a ban on them,” Vartak said.

Maruti Bhapkar of Swaraj Abhiyan said, “It is a highly condemnable act. What is more shocking is that the police have remained spectators and not initiated any action.” Activist Manav Kamble said, “It speaks poorly of the Pune police. How can they permit such acts?.” When contacted, Joint Commissioner of Police Sunil Ramanand said, “We are examining the legality in the matter and will take appropriate action.”

State Congress spokesperson Sachin Sawant said, “The Congress has been against such kind of tendencies... We have been demanding a ban on such organisations, but the present state government seems to be in support of such organisations and their acts which go against the law of the land.” Shiv Sena spokesperson Neelam Gorhe said, “Till a person is found guilty, he is innocent. Therefore, a protest march can be taken out in their support, but it was not an appropriate act to do so on the same day on which Dabholkar was killed.”

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/narendra-dabholkar-murder-case-sanatan-sanstha-marches-carrying-pictures-of-murder-accused-2988206/>

### ***Nav Hind Times***

#### **Marches in Pune to mark death anniversary of Dabholkar**

Rival processions here marked the third death anniversary of anti-superstition campaigner

Narendra Dabholkar who was killed on this day in 2013 when he was out for a morning walk. Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmulan Samiti (MANS), several other like-minded groups, civil society activists and others took out a large procession demanding justice for Dabholkar who was gunned down by two unknown motorcycle-borne shooters.

Simultaneously, a few activists of Sanatan Sanstha — which has been linked to Dabholkar's murder through accused Vinod Tawde — and other groups attempted to take out a protest march but were stopped by the police.

They raised slogans calling for an end to what they called trial of Sanatan Sanstha by the media. Leading the MANS procession, Dabholkar's daughter Mukta urged all people to join the movement for peace and strengthen the voice of rationalists.

Dabholkar's son Hamid said if his father's killers remained untraced for three years, what hope the common masses could have for justice.

"We shall continue to demand justice and fight for the ideals which he stood for," Hamid said.

Sporting black ribbons and carrying banners and placards, the marchers shouted, 'Narendra Dabholkar Amar Rahe,' and walked to the spot where he was killed. The groups also organised cultural programmes in Dabholkar's memory.

Several commemorative marches, candle-light vigils and other programmes are being organised across Maharashtra to pay homage to Dabholkar.

<http://www.navhindtimes.in/marches-in-pune-to-mark-death-anniversary-of-dabholkar/>

## ***The Quint***

### **Dabholkar vs Sanatan: A Tale of Two Marches and Three Murders**

Vitthal Ramji bridge in Pune witnessed an unusual gathering on Saturday. After anti-superstition activist Dr. Narendra Dabholkar was shot on the bridge, his followers have been regularly taking out marches beginning from the bridge.

But on the third anniversary of his daylight assassination, an unexpected group of people marched on the same route: it was the Sanatan Sanstha, whose members are accused of plotting the murder!

The first march was organised by the Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (ANS), the anti-superstition organisation set up by Dr. Dabholkar. They painted the bridge in black and released black balloons in the air to protest the slow pace of investigations.



The second march began just after the first got over. It was led by hard-line Hindu organisation, Sanatan Sanstha. Two members of the Goa-based Sanstha are accused in the murder cases of Dr Dabholkar and communist leader Govind Pansare.

### **Same Day, Same Route, Similar Slogans**

Sanatan Sanstha's march in Pune is seen as an attempt to grab media attention as local media had extensively covered protest marches on the first two death anniversaries of Dabholkar. After two of its members were arrested and demand for a ban on the organisation renewed, the media cell of the Sanatan Sanstha has been working overtime. They have been sending detailed daily messages, holding regular press meets and trying to get as much air time as they can.

Sanatan Sanstha not only chose the same day and a similar route as the ANS, but they also raised similar slogans. The famous slogan of 'aamhi saare Dabhokar' (we are all Dabholkar) was changed to 'aamhi saare Sanaatan' (we are all Sanatan).

While anti-superstition activists demanded justice for Dabholkar, the Sanatan Sanstha demanded justice for the accused, who they believe are innocent

After back-to-back murders of Dabholkar and Pansare, programmes of Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (ANS) have become rallying points for all organisations and parties, which they term "anti-fascist". Activists and leaders of Communist parties, socialist parties, Republican parties, Aam Aadmi Party, labour unions, progressive Muslim organisations as well as members of progressive theatre and film movements were a part of the march.

On the other hand, the Sanatan managed to get local Shiv Sena leaders, Hindu Janajagruti, Goraksha Samiti and over a dozen of lesser known Hindu outfits on its side. Interestingly, apart from two of its members, Sanatan carried placards demanding justice for Sadhvi Pragya and Colonel Purohit, who are backed by the BJP. Slogans were also raised for Hindu Rashta Sena leader Dhananjay Desai, who is accused of rioting and killing Muslim youth in Pune.

Activists of ANS fear that Virendra Tawde, who is arrested by the CBI in connection with Dr Dabholkar's murder, will be freed if CBI fails to file a charge sheet within 90 days. Similarly, the Special Investigative Team of Maharashtra police is struggling to find substantial proof against Sameer Gaikwad, who is arrested in connection with Pansare murder case.

Karnataka CID has demanded custody of both Sanatan members as they suspect that the two killed rationalist MM Kalburgi as well.

Family members of Dr Dabholkar allege that the Maharashtra police, which had reportedly resorted to 'planchet' to find out murderers, had lost clues as they didn't act swiftly in the first few hours after the murder.

In the first week of this month, the Bombay High Court had expressed displeasure at the pace at which investigations were proceeding. "If investigations do not conclude fast, it might give an impression to people that you don't want to arrest certain people," the court had told CBI and SIT

<https://www.thequint.com/india/2016/08/21/narendra-dabholkar-vs-sanatan-a-tale-of-two-marches-and-three-murders-kalburgi-shiv-sena-ans-rationalists>

### ***First Post***

## **Rival processions mark third death anniversary of Narendra Dabholkar in Pune**

**Pune:** Rival processions in Pune marked the third death anniversary of anti-superstition campaigner Narendra Dabholkar who was killed on 20 August, 2013 when he was out for a morning walk.

Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmulan Samiti (MANS), several other like-minded groups, civil society activists and others took out a large procession demanding justice for Dabholkar who was gunned down by two unknown motorcycle-borne shooters.

Simultaneously, a few activists of Sanatan Sanstha -- which has been linked to Dabholkar's murder through accused Vinod Tawde -- and other groups attempted to take out a protest march but were stopped by the police.

They raised slogans calling for an end to what they called trial of Sanatan Sanstha by the media.

Leading the MANS procession, Dabholkar's daughter Mukta urged all people to join the movement for peace and strengthen the voice of rationalists.

Dabholkar's son Hamid said if his father's killers remained untraced for three years, what hope can the common masses have for justice.

"We shall continue to demand justice and fight for the ideals which he stood for," Hamid said.

Sporting black ribbons and carrying banners and placards, the marchers shouted, 'Narendra Dabholkar Amar Rahe,' (long live Narendra Dabholkar) and walked to the spot where he was killed. The groups also organised cultural programmes in Dabholkar's memory.

Several commemorative marches, candle-light vigils and other programmes are being organised across Maharashtra to pay homage to Dabholkar.

<http://www.firstpost.com/india/rival-processions-mark-third-death-anniversary-of-narendra-dabholkar-in-pune-2967040.html>

## **Outlook**

### **ANS, Sanatan Take Out Rallies on Dabholkar Death Anniversary**

As many as 1,000 activists of the Maharashtra Andha-shraddha Nirmulan Samiti (ANS) and like-minded organisations today took out a procession to observe the third death anniversary of anti-superstition crusader Narendra Dabholkar here.

As the procession winded its way towards the Omkareshwar bridge where Dabholkar, founder of ANS, was shot dead by unidentified assailants on August 20, 2013, supporters of the right-wing Hindu organisation Sanatan Sanstha took out a protest march.

Sanatan Sanstha has come under the scanner following the murders of Dabholkar and fellow rationalist and CPI leader Govind Pansare in Maharashtra.

Police had to intervene to ensure that two processions did not come face to face.

"It has been three years and agencies are yet to nab the real perpetrators of Dabholkar's murder, and there is no progress in the investigation after the arrest of Virendra Tawde," said Mukta, Dabholkar's daughter.

Seeking justice for her father, she urged the people to join in the rationalist movement. People were in fact slowly joining the progressive movement pioneered by Dabholkar and it was a good sign, she said.

Members of progressive organisations had decided to write to the Prime Minister seeking speedy investigation of the murders of rationalists, she said.

Participants in the ANS's procession sported black ribbons and shouted slogans hailing Dabholkar, Pansare and Kannada scholar M M Kalburgi who was shot dead in Dharwad last year, allegedly by the right-wing extremists.

On the other hand, supporters of Sanatan Sanstha, whose 'sadhaks' (disciples) Virendra Tawde and Sameer Gaikwad have been arrested in the Dabholkar and Pansare murder cases, respectively, protested against "harassment" by investigation agencies.

"Tawde and Gaikwad are being harassed and there is no concrete evidence against them," said Sunil Ghanvat of Sanatan Sanstha.

Several programmes, including a film festival, have been organised in the city to mark Dabholkar's death anniversary.

CBI is probing the Dabholkar murder case after the state police failed to make any headway. CBI made its first arrest -- of Tawde -- in the case in June this year.

<http://m.news-adding.com/news/57b8a4ec9b5cae4b2779e590>

## A Brahmin's Cow Tales

Sheela Reddy

For over a month, the mild, balding professor of history, Dwijendra Narayan Jha, has been shuffling to his classroom in Delhi University escorted by a police constable. Teaching ancient history does not usually endanger one's health, but ever since Jha went public with the best-kept secret in Indian history—the beef-eating habits of ancient Hindus, Buddhists and even early Jains in a book titled *Holy Cow: Beef in Indian Dietary Conditions* his phone hasn't stopped ringing. "The calls are usually abusive," says Jha, "but sometimes they demand to know what evidence I have, and one day late in July it was an anonymous caller threatening dire consequences if I ever brought out my book."

The calls had two effects on the 61-year-old historian: he called the police and braced himself for battle. "There is a cultural war going on and academics have a role to play," Jha says calmly. But it's not the kind of war that he had anticipated. Even before his book could hit the stands, the VHP exhorted its cadre to confiscate and burn copies. The BJP followed suit: one of its MPs, R.S. Rawat, wrote to the Union home minister demanding not only a ban on the book but also the arrest and prosecution of its author and CB Publishers. But before the book could be burnt or banned, the Jain Seva Sangh stepped in. Outraged by Jha's reported assertion that their founder Mahavira ate meat, the Hyderabad-based organisation sought a court injunction against the book, leaving the nonplussed historian without the words to fight his war. Anticipating controversy and debate, Jha meticulously scoured ancient texts, culling material from original sources for over two years. "If they want to ban my book, then they will have to ban the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Sutras and the epics. Where will they stop? I have given evidence, if they have counter-evidence, why don't they come forward with it? But they are so illiterate, they haven't even heard of those texts, let alone read them. I have texts and they go by blind faith," he says. "That is what a historian can and should do: counter faith with facts," he adds.

Jha's interest in dietary history began a few years ago after reading French historian Fernand Braudel's history of early modern European diet. But he soon became intrigued by the beef-eating habits of Indians which existed in Rig Vedic times and continued till the 19th century and after, despite repeated Brahminical injunctions against cow-killing. That ancient Hindus, including Brahmins, were beef-eaters, willing to incur the minor penalty that an agrarian society began imposing on cow-killers, and that this fondness for cattle meat had nothing to do with Islam or Christianity came neither as a shock nor surprise to this unconventional Brahmin, whose first name Dwijendra means "the holiest of Brahmins". "No serious historian, not even 'Hindu' ones like R.C. Majumdar or K.M. Munshi, has ever disputed that ancient Hindus ate beef," says Jha. However, convinced that repeated Brahminical injunctions not to kill cows reflected a popular proclivity for beef, Jha went further and unearthed irrefutable evidence of cow slaughter and consumption by Hindus of all classes, including Brahmins, until as late as the 19th century. "I was expecting this,"

says Jha, who tasted beef for the first time nearly 30 years ago at Cambridge. "It was difficult to believe Brahmins were laying down norms without a reason. I think there is much more evidence than I got."

The cow as a sacred animal, Jha believes, did not really gain currency until Dayanand Saraswati's cow protection movement in the 19th century". The cow became a tool of mass political mobilisation with the organised cow-protection movement," the historian points out. "The killing of cows stopped gradually with the agrarian society and caste rigidity. The Brahmins found it convenient to say that those who ate beef were untouchable. But they themselves continued to consume it, recommending it for occasions such as shraadh. Simultaneously, they trivialised the beef taboo by saying that eating beef is like cleaning your teeth with your fingers. It was never a sin to eat it, merely an indecorum. There was never a taboo, only discouragement."

With this discovery, culled from ancient scriptures, medical texts, the Manusmriti and religious commentaries, Jha impishly "decided to take the bull by its horns" and publish a book on his findings. "There is a saying in Hindi: Laaton ke bhoot, baaton se nahin maante (Those used to force are not persuaded by words). So I had to give them the shock treatment," he explains.

Only, Jha's "shock treatment" did not stop with Hindus. Buddhists, he claims, citing canonical texts like Mahaparinibbana Sutta and Anguttara Nikaya, also ate beef and other meat. "In fact, the Buddha died after eating a meal of pork," he says. "Vegetarianism was not a viable option for Buddhist monks in a society that loved meat of all kinds—pig, rhinoceros, cow, buffalo, fish, snake, birds, including crows and peacocks. Only camel and dog meat was taboo in India."

Similarly with the early Jains. Citing the Bhagavatisutra, Jha points out that Mahavira once ate a chicken meal to gain strength for a yogic battle with an adversary. "His only condition was to ask the woman who cooked the meal to find a chicken already killed by a cat instead of slaughtering a fresh one," says Jha. "This has upset the Jains, but why are they not upset with the texts that carry these stories? I found these in bookstores run by devout Jain booksellers like Motilal Banarsidass and Sohanlal Jain Dharam Pracharak Samiti."

Despite Jha's avowed dislike of "being conspicuous", the man whose family consists of "a wife and three servants" has never shied away from controversy. His family is accustomed to his "mad ways" and his upbringing has been unorthodox enough to allow him to experiment even with beef. But his community of orthodox Maithili Brahmins in Bihar has not taken kindly to his book either. "They didn't like me citing sources from Mithila to prove my point," says Jha nonchalantly.

"Indian society has come to such a juncture," says Jha, "that historians have to play an active role in countering superstitions and unreason." He took up cudgels during the Ayodhya dispute and even objected to the TV serialisation of epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. "It politicised the myths and propagated a value system and religiosity not in keeping with a state-run broadcaster," he says. "Ramanand Sagar's version of the epics is not real history."

"Old and tired out" Jha may call himself, but there's something irrepressible about him. Bans and fatwas haven't stopped him from beginning work on his next book. "It will be called," says Jha with deadpan face, *"Adulterous Gods and their Inebriated Women"*.

<http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/a-brahmins-cow-tales/213159>

Courtesy: Outlook

■■■

## Reason To Think

What we need is a scientific temper, not obscurantist rantings

*Kaushik Basu*

My father grew up poor in the bylanes of north Calcutta, and did not have the knowledge and sophistication that come so easily to those born into privilege. He lived, instead, by his considerable powers of reasoning and common sense. These, and some measure of luck, led to success late in his life, when he became Mayor of Calcutta. He did not show it, but must have been nervous when, in the early 1960s, he went to Ottawa to represent India at an international conference.

That was the time Barry Goldwater, the controversial right-wing Senator from Arizona, was gearing up to run for the American presidency (he would eventually lose to Lyndon Johnson). On my father's arrival in Ottawa, he was accosted by an American journalist for an interview, much of which turned out to be on Goldwater. On his return, my father was praised for the interview and his political skill of answering at length without giving out his hand. Later, within the confines of home, he confessed he had had no choice. He had no idea who or what Goldwater was. From the interviewer's questions, he deduced that Goldwater was either a new scientific discovery or a politician; and had to make up for his lack of knowledge by crafting answers that could fit both. The upshot was his reputation for diplomacy.

This is a frivolous example of the value of both knowledge and reasoning. Not having knowledge is a handicap; the capacity for rational thought is empowering. I begin with this example to argue for something more serious—to alert us to the contagion of unreason unfolding around us, as this eventful year draws to a close.

A lot of the worst atrocities in the world are being perpetrated in the name of religion. This is ironical because religion was meant to be a force for good. The problem stems from the fact that, sadly, religion often becomes a substitute for reason and questioning. This can be seen in the way people so often argue—this happens in almost all religious groups—about what some ancient text really meant, to justify their own current behavior. What they do not say is that it does not matter what this book of antiquity says on each and every matter, because there are some matters on which they disagree with it. Even if there does exist the perfect, unarguable text—and in principle there is no reason why there cannot be—it requires a measure of naivety to believe that the one

you have identified is it. A measure of scepticism in all matters is a mark of not just modesty but wisdom.

What these followers do not realise is that, since most religious texts were written by bold, independent thinkers who were ready to think for themselves and break with tradition, not to question such texts is to show disrespect to the founders of the religion.

Often, it is elementary logical mistakes that lead people to bigotry. The hallmark of India has been its openness, the fact that it welcomed diverse peoples and religions arriving at its shores, and it absorbed and enriched different ideas and cultures flowing into the nation. And here, I am almost paraphrasing the famous lines from Rabindranath Tagore's poetry in the *Gitanjali*.

Sadly, there is a growing insecurity about this, and there is a concomitant tendency to close our doors to diversity. This is often done in the name of avoiding imitation. Thus we hear statements like, "We shall not imitate the people of nation X, because the people of nation X do not imitate us." The first problem with this statement is that it entails a basic self-contradiction. In taking such a stand, you are in fact imitating the people of nation X and so violating the very principle you are propagating.

Secondly, to open the doors to diverse ideas and discoveries by other nations and other people is not imitation. It is a sign of one's own self-confidence that one is willing to take the best of what others have to offer. As Amartya Sen pointed out, one of India's great strengths is that it is an argumentative nation. It questions, contests, challenges and then, at times, accepts and at times rejects. To engage in this manner is a sign of self-confidence; whereas silencing, banning and closing one's doors stems from a sense of inferiority. If a nation is to progress in these trying times, it is important for it to remain open even when it hurts, and to be inclusive even if it means we have to move aside a little to make space for others.

Another mistake that is fuelling this crisis of unreason is the widespread propensity to respond to bigotry with bigotry. There is no doubt that there are happenings from around the world which are abhorrent. But it is an unreasoned reaction that would have us respond to groups or practices that we detest most by fashioning ourselves after those very groups. An eye must not be responded to with an eye, to echo Gandhiji's famous observation, which through repetition may sound trite, but remains as relevant today as it was in the time of the Mahatma.

At this juncture, what is vital is education, to impart to people the ability to think for themselves, to question, examine and cogitate over every received wisdom and keep those that pass one's own judgement. This does not guarantee success (there is no surefire recipe for that) but it creates minds that aid progress, science, discovery and innovation.

We visit archaeological sites to see the achievements of human civilisation. But we fail to acknowledge that while these achievements may manifest themselves in stone, marble and masonry, they are founded in inquiry, reason and the quest for knowledge. It is these traits of the

human mind that drive civilisations. It is true that they are not sufficient to build a good society. For that, one also needs normative qualities such as those of compassion and kindness. But reason and the capacity for cogitation are necessary conditions. To end on a more practical note, India must invest more in education. The questioning, scientific mind is the fodder for development. India owes what success it has had to the large investments in higher education that it made at the time of its founding. It is true that the downside of this was that basic education and literacy, which should also have received attention, were neglected. At this time of global turbulence and challenge, India must invest more heavily in both basic and higher education.

Religion is a private matter. People should be free to choose their religion and to not have a religion if they are so inclined. The mistake that we must not make is to treat religion as a substitute for thought and reason.

*(Kaushik Basu is senior vice-president and chief economist at the World Bank and professor of economics and C. Marks professor of international studies at Cornell University. This essay is written in his individual capacity and is independent of his professional affiliations.)*

<http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/reason-to-think/292932>

Courtesy: Outlook



## The Shaman-Shyster:

New book traces the rise and fall of Chandraswami

*Shantanu Guha Ray*

Did Jayaprakash Narayan, counted among the most reverential politicians, write a personal letter to his friends to introduce Chandraswami, who eventually turned out to be India's most dubious godman? Yes, says a recent book - *Gurus: Stories of India's Leading Babas* (Westland Books) - penned by veteran journalist Bhavdeep Kang.

In the chapter, titled *The Shaman-Shyster: Chandraswami*, Kang scripts how in 1975, a few months before the imposition of the Emergency, Narayan met up at his quarters in the Gandhi Peace Foundation with Chandraswami, then a frail figure known as Nemi Chandra Jain, a young *sadhu* in white, with bushy hair, a frizzy beard and heavy gold amulet around his neck.

The Lok Nayak (People's Hero, a reverential term of address for JP) couldn't have imagined that the youth he described as "an eminent spiritual seeker and devotee of Bhagawati" would, in a matter of two decades, become the most infamous godman of all time: Chandraswami.

He would be suspected of a hand in the murder of a prime minister and in the most controversial arms deal ever, the Iran-Contra affair, writes Kang in her brilliantly researched tome that tracks the life of Indian godmen.

Kang, who met up with Chandraswami at his south Delhi residence, says the godman is ageing, having lost all the riches he owned many years ago. Then, famously pretty and accomplished



women would flutter around him like exotic butterflies. So would international wheeler dealers and political fixers. Scandal, through the 1980s and 1990s, had another name: Chandraswami. He would wield influence with heads of state like Margaret Thatcher, the Sultan of Brunei, Muda Hassanal Bolkia Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah, Sheikh Isa Khalifa of Bahrain, Sese Seko Mobutu of Zaire and two Indian PMs. His birthday would be celebrated with pomp and politicians of all hues would fight to be seen with the godman.

His fall would be as abrupt as his rise and in 1996, Tihar jail would receive its most famous prisoner till date: Chandraswami.

The chapter on Chandraswami is part of a new book, '*Gurus: Stories of India's Leading Babas*' by Bhavdeep Kang.

King says the word “godman” would forever take on a dubious meaning, as newspapers across the world lifted the veil on his caliginous world of sex, arms, drugs, money and power-broking. For an entire generation, he came to symbolise the seamy side of spiritualism. Gurus before him took meditation, yoga and Ayurveda to the West; the worst that could be said of them was that they were charlatans. Chandraswami was seen as an unmitigated villain.

The *ashram* in Delhi's Qutub Institutional Area, where he broke bread with prime ministers and hosted Delhi's power elite, is now sparse of company. The godman spends his days ensconced in a Lazy Boy on the third floor of the edifice, meeting the odd visitor or sallying forth to public functions, generally hosted and where his presence as chief guest is still solicited.

The building, like its owner, has clearly seen better days. The elaborately carved stone facades are desperately in need of a brush and detergent and the dining hall is frankly grubby. The furniture is grimy, the furnishings frayed. The rooms are crammed with massive, heavily embellished furniture that hasn't seen a touch of polish for a while. Every available surface is hidden under felicitatory mementos, testimony to his fan following in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

“The big-bellied godman himself looked weary, a far cry from the burly, imposing swami with the laser drill gaze who held the movers and shakers of the world in thrall. One eyelid drooped, giving him a permanent wink. He spoke slowly, with a palpable effort. Stripped of power, he appeared leached of vitality,” writes Kang.

He doesn't care what is said and written about him, he told me categorically. He stands vindicated by courts of law, which have given the lie to all the conspiracies against him. Nor does he care for the trappings of power.

He is a sadhu and it is all the same for him. Luxury or austerity, company or the lack of it, jail or *ashram*. Detachment from all things material is the mark of a true sadhu, but it's not a trait I'd associate with Chandraswami, son of a money lender (Dharma Chand Gandhi Jain) who spent a lifetime cosying up to the rich and powerful. His evolution from a *bal sant* (child saint) from Behror in Rajasthan to Rajguru (royal preceptor), was astonishingly rapid. He learnt tantric practices, his

first spiritual mentor was Mahaupadhyay Amar Muni, a Jain saint who later directed the 23-year-old Nemi to Kaviraj Mahaupadhyay Gopinath of Benaras. However, Chandraswami also acknowledged Anandamayi Maa and Kanchi Shankaracharya as his gurus. Four years of continuous *sadhana* in the forests granted him extraordinary powers as an astrologer and mind-reader, an impressive cocktail which helped him gain access into the homes of those who mattered.

He could read up all those who came to him for favours. In Adnan Khashoggi (the Saudi Arabian businessman-turned-arms dealer), his inner eye saw past the love of luxury, women and money.

Sudini Jaipal Reddy, a senior member of the Congress party, met Chandraswami in 1972 and was impressed to know that the sadhu knew everything Reddy wanted to ask. The next step was to meet Andhra CM PV Narasimha Rao.

Chandraswami then travelled to London with a note from Yashpal Kapur of Congress to meet up with K Natwar Singh, now an ex-diplomat, politician and author. Natwar and his wife dined with Chandraswami, after which he demonstrated his powers, repeating the trick that had intrigued Jaipal Reddy. He asked Ms Singh to write down three questions on separate strips of paper, fold them and put them on a chessboard. The questions were in English, but he recalled each one of them accurately. Natwar was impressed.

Singh - with a further push from the then Indian foreign minister YB Chavan - helped Swami meet Margaret Thatcher. She asked him what she could do for him. He replied that he wanted nothing from her. The swami then performed his oft-repeated trick, asking Thatcher to write down five questions on separate strips of paper and ball them up. As always, he then told her what the questions were. Intrigued and overwhelmed, the lady asked to meet him again, but this time, in Singh's home. There, Chandraswami scooped out a *taweez* (amulet) from his bag and advised Margaret Thatcher to wear red when she came to see him. She obliged. He later told her that she would become prime minister of UK in 3-4 years and remain in office for nine, 11 or even 13 years. And the rest, as they say, is history — replete with examples of Chandra Swami's brilliant network. He seemed to know everyone — Khashoggi, Saddam Hussein, the al Fayed brothers, who he introduced to the Sultan of Brunei. When al Fayed purchased Harrods, the swami was said to have been involved in the deal. Eminent citizens, including heads of state of many countries, were deeply influenced by the globe-trotting Swami, who was not a sophisticated man but had a talent for entering the heads of others, reading weakness, particularly someone in a position of authority who had the loneliness and anticipation of betrayal that comes with an excess of power and money. In Mobutu, the King of Zaire's case for instance, Chandraswami would hide behind a curtain when people came to meet him and later tell his buddy whether they were to be trusted or not.

This chapter is, arguably, the best in the book.

<http://www.firstpost.com/living/the-shaman-shyster-new-book-traces-the-rise-and-fall-of-chandraswami-2708364.html>

Courtesy: firstpost.com

## Monk, in nude, talks of Pakistan, female foeticide, duty of wife in Haryana Assembly

*Khushboo Sandhu*

He (Tarun Sagar, Jain monk) equated dharma to the husband and politics to the wife, suggesting that the latter should “accept the discipline” imposed by the former.

He recommended ways to eradicate female foeticide. He even took potshots at Pakistan. And all through the discourse that lasted 40 minutes, Jain religious leader Tarun Sagar had MLAs cutting across party lines at the Haryana Assembly listening in rapt attention.

Delivering his “Kadve Vachan” to mark the start of the monsoon session, the first such event organised at the Vidhan Sabha, the monk, who appeared in the nude, was seated on a dais, above the seats of the Governor, Chief Minister and MLAs.

Invited to speak by Education Minister Ram Bilas Sharma, Sagar said, “राजनीति पर धर्म का अंकुश जरूरी है. धर्म पती है, राजनीति पत्नी. हर पती की यह ड्युटी होती है अपनी पत्नी को संरक्षण दे. हर पत्नी का धर्म होता है कि वह पती के अनुशासन को स्वीकार करे. अगर राजनीति पर धर्म का अंकुश न रहा तो वह मगन मस्त हाथी की तरह... हो जाती है. (The control of dharma over politics is essential. Dharma is the husband, politics is the wife. It is the duty of every husband to protect his wife. It is the duty of every wife to accept the discipline of her husband. If there is no control of dharma over politics, it will be like an elephant out of control).”

Sagar identified female foeticide as a “big problem” that was disturbing the balance of society, leading to more crimes and rapes, and said that he had come up with a formula to tackle it at three levels — political, social and religious.

“At the political level, the government should decide that those who do not have daughters should not have the right to contest Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections. At the level of society, people should not marry their daughters into families that do not have daughters. At the religious level, saints should decide that they will not accept alms from houses where there are no daughters. The result will exceed expectations if this formula is followed. We are living in the 21st century. Even today, when boys and girls are differentiated, I feel we are living in the 14th century,” he said.

At this juncture, Sagar took a dig at Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, who is a bachelor, saying, “खट्टर साहिब के इनमेंसे बाहर कर दो. (Khattar should be kept out of this).”

Taking on politicians, Sagar said that the Parliament, which was set up to solve the country’s problems, has become the biggest problem. He claimed that according to a survey, 160 MPs have criminal cases registered against them and said that efforts should be made to ensure that criminal elements are “not able to climb the stairs of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha”.

Terming terrorism as a major issue, Sagar said that no religion promotes terror. If the amount of government money that is spent on weapons is used for education, employment and healthcare, there would be a transformation, he said.

Taking potshots at Pakistan he said, “हमारा पड़ोसी देश, सब को मालूम है, आतंकवाद को आसन दे रहा है... भस्मासुर पैदा कर रहा है... भारत को परेशान करने के लिये. मुझे लगता है आज नहीं तो कल भस्मासुर तय्यार कर रहा है अपने लिये. एक बार गलती करें वह अज्ञान है, दो बार गलती करें वह नादान है, तीन बार गलती करें वह शैतान है और जो बार बार गलती करें वह पाकिस्तान है. जो हर बार क्षमा कर दे, वह हिंदुस्तान है. (Everyone knows that the neighbouring country is harbouring terrorism... creating Bhasmasurs to trouble India. If someone makes a mistake once he is ignorant, if someone makes a mistake twice he is innocent, if someone makes a mistake thrice he is the devil, and if someone makes a mistake repeatedly, that is Pakistan. And the one who forgives repeatedly is India).”

Sagar also praised the Narendra Modi government for prescribing a retirement age for active politicians, and had a word of advice for the Khattar government. ” अगर हमने ऋषिकेश में गंगा का शुद्धीकरण कर लिया, तो हरिद्वार और उसके नीचे के तमाम घाट अपने आप शुद्ध होते चले जायेंगे. अगर सत्र के पहले ही दिन आपने धर्म को अपने यहाँ पे बिठा लिया, राजनीति के तमाम घाट अपने आप शुद्ध होते चले जायेंगे. खट्टर सरकार पर यह आरोप लग सकता है कि इन्होंने राजनीति का भगवाकरण कर दिया, पर मैं आप से निवेदन करना चाहूंगा, यह राजनीति का भगवाकरण नहीं है, बल्कि राजनीति का शुद्धीकरण है. (If we manage to purify Ganges in Rishikesh, then Haridwar and all its ghats will automatically keep getting purified. If on first day of this session you place Dharma in the assembly, all the ghats of politics will automatically keep getting purified on their own. There may be allegations against the Khattar government that they have saffronised politics, but I would request you that it is not saffronisation of politics, rather it is the cleansing of politics),” he said.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/tarun-sagar-jain-religious-leader-monsoon-session-female-foeticide-eradication-pakistan-haryana-2998501/>

*Courtesy: Indian Express*

■■■

## Furore Over Sermon for MLAs

*Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar*

Jain Samaj lodged police complaints against Tehseen Poonawala and Vishal Dadlani for their tweets about the Jain monk who spoke at the Haryana assembly. Credit: Facebook

The lodging of an online complaint by the Jain Samaj against Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) activist Vishal Dadlani and columnist, model and Congress supporter Tehseen Poonawala for their

allegedly “offensive” tweets about Jain preacher Tarun Sagar, who addressed the Haryana assembly on August 26, may have taken some sheen away from the issue they wanted to raise, but it has definitely not been able to silence the critics of the move. A large number of people still feel that religion should not have too much of a say in the politics of the country.

While Dadlani and Poonawala’s sharp tweets may haunt them for some time to come, the strongest reaction on the issue has been from the Haryana state unit of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or the CPI(M). In a politically mature manner, the unit criticised the Jain monk’s discourse in the assembly – objecting to the speech’s content and stating that this was not the first time a religious preacher has been allowed to give a sermon at the assembly.

### **CPI(M) raises objections**

Demonstrating how criticism should be objective rather than personal, Surendra Singh, the state secretary of CPI(M) questioned Sagar’s statement that it was essential for religion to have a hold over politics and that religion is the man while politics is his wife, who accepts the limits set by him. “This statement not only smacks of male chauvinism, it is also anti-women and against the constitution of the country,” said Singh, who did not even name the Jain preacher in his statement, but only attacked him for his words.

Elaborating on the subject, Singh said the Indian constitution separates religion and politics and does not accept discrimination in the name of sex, religion, caste, language and so on. He demanded the Haryana government issue a clarification on the issue.

Singh also stated that the event symbolised the BJP’s attempt to make its communal agenda acceptable to the public. The CPI(M) leader also took on the other political parties in the Haryana assembly saying that the leaders of the Congress, Indian National Lok Dal (INDL) and the Bahujan Samaj Party did not object to the programme. Incidentally, Kiran Chaudhary, Congress’ leader of opposition and INLD leader Zakir Hussain had welcomed Sagar to the assembly.

Singh expressed surprise that these parties did not oppose holding this event and in fact, they supported it. “This just shows their opportunistic character and ideological decline, which is one of the reasons why [the] BJP has come up so far,” he said.

He further said that assemblies were not the place for religious leaders. His remarks seemed to echo the sentiments of a large group of countrymen who were left aghast by the importance given to religion over politics in a democratic state and especially the manner in which the religious preacher was allowed to address the house – from a podium that was higher than the seats of the governor, chief minister and MLAs. “If the solutions to the problems of the society could have been obtained through religious discourses, then these problems would not have arisen at all”,

Singh said, adding that “social problems were on a rise” despite an increase in the number of channels now showing religious programmes.

Singh also cautioned that the BJP was moving at a pace more rapid than the Congress by allowing foreign capital to exploit the country’s resources and loot public institutions. He said the saffron party is using religion as a garb to establish a political order in which it can function without hindrance. Singh warned people that India should not be allowed to convert into a dictatorial nation like Pakistan.

### **Furore over tweets**

Meanwhile, Dadlani’s personal attack on the Jain saint for his participation in the event has caused immense harm to the music composer’s political aspirations, who was considered a close confidante of Kejriwal and first entered the political limelight in 2011 during the India Against Corruption agitation at Ramlila Maidan. In July, he was again seen sitting with Kejriwal in his office during the #TalktoAK programme.

After announcing his decision to leave the party on Saturday, Dadlani tweeted on Sunday that he has not been thrown out of AAP but decided to renounce politics to apologise to the Jains for the hurt he caused them.

<http://thewire.in/62304/furore-over-sermon-for-mlas-shows-how-combustible-religion-and-politics-can-be/>

*Courtesy: thewire.in*

■■■

## **The Present Status of Investigation of Dr Dabholkar Murder Case**

Prabhakar Nanawaty

After an enormous delay of 33 months, CBI had arrested Dr Virendra Tawade who is Sadhak of Sanatan Sanstha and Hindu Janjagaran Samiti. CBI had issued a statement in the Session Court that he had been arrested as main suspect in the killing of Dr Dabholkar, Panasare and Kalburgi. Just a few days before his arrest, CBI raided the flats belonging to Dr Virendra Tawade and Sarang Akolkar. CBI is in possession of information collected during exchange of secretly coded emails between them. The emails reveal the terrorist like conspiracy to assassinate ‘Hindu Dharm Drohi’ like Dr Dabholkar, to raise a private ‘Army’ of 15000 volunteers to protect ‘Hindu Nation’. Akolkar is Sanstha activist and is absconded criminal since 2009.

During 2008, Sanstha activists, Malagonda Patil and Vijay Naik were killed when a bomb went off on a scooter while they were traveling. NIA is investigating this case for last 6 years. Four

suspected criminals viz, Jai Prakash Hegade, Rudra Patil, Sarang Akolkar and Praveen Limkar, involved in this bomb blast are still absconding in spite of Red Corner Notice. Surprisingly, the suspects are still not traceable though initially these suspects were arrested by NIA. The arrested accused were let off for want of evidence. Due to sheer negligence on part of NIA the criminals went Scot-free. As an after thought we can make a statement that the timely action by NIA would have saved the precious lives of Dr Dabholkar, Comrade Panasare and Dr Kalburgi.

It is understood that Dr Tawade is in contact with these criminals regularly. The arrest and custodial interrogation of these four criminals may be able to solve the murder cases and reach the masterminds behind these murders. SS Advocate Punalkar also announced publicly that he is in touch with Sarang akolkar and Rudra Patil. The abetting the criminals is a serious crime. As such Punalkar should be subjected to police enquiry to extract the relevant information.

Due to initiative taken by Adv Abhay Nevagi and family members of Dr Dabholkar and Panasare, a case was filed in the Mumbai High Court. The Court ordered speedy investigation. In fact the photographs of absconded suspects and the sketches of assassins released had some similarities. This was brought to the notice of Court too. However after the arrest of Sameer Gaikwad in Panasare murder case, Court ordered CBI and SIT to investigate whereabouts of Rudra Patil, a friend of Sarang Akolkar. Court had shown its displeasure for the delay of 10 months while investigating the whereabouts. During the last hearing, Court asked the Govt that how many commemoration days need to be observed before the arrest of the suspects. These comments might have accelerated the pace of investigation.

ANiS is strongly protesting against the lethargic approach of the investigating agencies. Even after passing of 36 months after killing of Dr Dabholkar, the investigation has not reached to any conclusion. Executive President of ANiS, Avinash Patil has demanded to display the photographs of all suspects in each and every police station in Maharashtra. Red Corner Notice should be given to arrest absconding criminals, Jai Prakash Hegade, Rudra Patil, Sarang Akolkar and Praveen Limkar, who were prime accused in the 2009 Goa blast case. It is suspected that they too had involvement in Dabholkar murder case. It is important to arrest these absconded suspects immediately. Sanatan Sanstha advocate Sanjiv Punalakar had issued a press statement that he too is in contact with Sarang Akolkar and Rudra Patil. If so, custodial interrogation should be initiated against the Advocate who is supporting these criminals.

Sanatan Sanstha had started spreading rumors and false accusations against investigatng agencies and the witnesses that came forward to reveal the identity. Considering the vicious attitude and information available about Sanatan Sanstha and Hindu Janjagaran Samiti, these orgnaisations should be banned immediately. The witnesses should be given police protection till the charge sheet is submitted.

In the year 2011, UPA Govt which included Congress party and NCP were ruling Maharashtra. The then Govt forwarded a proposal to impose ban on the 'dangerous' activities of SS and HJS.

Shri Sushilkumar Shinde was Home Minister of Central Govt during that period. However he did not take any cognizance of this proposal and kept the case pending. The Central Govt did not convey its stand till today even after ANiS delegation met present Home Minister, Shri Rajnath Singh and briefed him about the activities of criminal nature of SS and HJS. As such the general public is anxious to know the stand taken by the Govt of India and Govt of Maharashtra about these organisations who are unscrupulously advocating and supporting terrorist like anti-constitutional methods to achieve their hidden agenda.

Shri Vijay Rokade had lodged PIL in Mumbai High Court to ban SS. After two years of lodging PIL, the case has come for hearing only in this month. It has been argued that the activities of SS are anti-constitutional leading to violence. Govt generally imposes ban under the Unlawful Activity Prevention Act for which the organization had been punished by Court at least in one criminal case. In fact SS has been found guilty in 2008. However there was some technical hitch to impose the ban. As such ANiS now demands that since the activities of SS and HJS are anti-constitutional, anti national and terrorist like, the severe action, therefore, should be taken against these 'dangerous' organizations.

Following are the reasons to impose the sanction against SS and HJS:

1. Ministry of Home Affairs of Maharashtra and Central Govt should come out clearly the stand they have taken in this regard.
2. Govt of Maharashtra should publish the information about its report submitted in 2011 banning SS and its activities.
3. Take suitable action on 'Sanatan Prabhat' a daily newspaper published by SS which supports violence and terrorism in the name of religion.
4. Sanatan Sanstha Advocate Sanjiv Punalakar who claims that he is in contact with absconding suspects, Sarang Akolkar and Rudra Patil should be subjected to custodial interrogation.
5. An enquiry should be initiated against the Sadhak who threatened Sahitya Samelan President to face dire consequences like 'Morning Walk' (Both Dr Dabholkar and Comrade Panasare gunned down while they were taking morning walk.)
6. The photograph of Police Officer Krishna Prakash was defaced by cross insignia appearing on the web site of Sanstha. Clarification is sought from the concerned whether any action will be taken against the miscreants.

ANiS requests the public to keep away from these organizations who are advocating violent measures under the garb of Hindu spirituality.

The lack of political will and immature handling of the case by investigating agencies had forced to express its displeasure to Mumbai High Court. Court took very serious note of deficiencies in investigations and directed the Govt and administration and warned about its consequences. That may be one of the reasons for progressing the investigation upto this stage. ANiS had protested peacefully for last three years. The pressure from media and ANiS had played important role in this



regard. It is hoped that the mastermind and the murderers of Dr Dabholkar will be behind the bars soon and the organizations supporting the criminal and terrorist like activities will be banned soon.

### **Gist of the letter written to CM, Maharashtra**

*Respected Sir,*

*34 months have passed since the gruesome murder of Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, founder of ANiS, social activist, rationalist and progressive thinker. Soon after this killing, Comrade Govind Panasare, one more social activist and progressive thinker, was shot at close ranges on 16 Feb 15 and he succumbed to death on 20 Feb 15 which is about 16 months. The assassination of social activists and rationalists in a State of Mahatma Phule, Shahu Maharaj and Dr. Ambedkar is quite shameful. In addition, there was a similar incident of killing of Dr. Kalburgi in the neighboring State, Karnataka, on 30 Aug 2015. The modes operandi of these killings appears to be almost same.*

*It is regretted that there was a very little progress after the arrest of a suspect in Panasare's murder case, Sameer Gaikwad, who was a member of Sanatan Sanstha, a Hindu outfit. However, in a recent past CBI had also arrested a prime suspect of Dr Dabholkar murder case, Dr Revindra Tawade, a member of SS and Commander of HJS, and CBI has indicated that there was a planned conspiracy to assassinate people whom they label as 'dharma drohi'.*

*In this connection, considering the facts that have come forward, we would like to put forth following suggestions for your immediate attention please:*

- 1. There should be detailed investigation of SS and its sister organization HJS, about the killers and mastermind behind these killings.*
- 2. NIA had declared that Jai Prakash Hegade, Rudra Patil, Sarang Akolkar and Praveen Limkar as absconded criminals of Goa Blast case, 2009. It is suggested that their photographs should be displayed at all police stations in Maharashtra.*
- 3. The delegation of family members of Dr Dabholkar tried 3-4 times to meet the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi to brief him about the case and hasten the investigation. You are requested to arrange the visit at the earliest.*
- 4. The prime suspects in the murder cases of Dr Dabholkar and Comrade Panasare are members of SS and HJS who are supporting the unlawful and criminal activities. A permanent sanction should be imposed permanently. There should be continuous watch on their antinational and terrorist like activities. The political party members, Govt officials and other social organizations should be requested to cooperate in the investigation and expose these dangerous organizations.*
- 5. Govt of Maharashtra had submitted its recommendations to outlaw the activities of SS in 2011 itself. The then Home minister Shri Sushilkumar Shinde did not take any action in this regard. ANiS delegation also met the present Home Minister, Shri Rajnath Singh in this regard. There is no action so far. Gol had not announced its position on this issue. You are requested to take up this issue freshly and convey the decision to public at large.*

6. *The witnesses which came forward and gave statements to investigating agencies are being harassed and subjected to slander. In fact one should appreciate their courage. As such police protection needs to be provided to these witnesses.*

*With kind regards,*

*Yours sincerely,*

*(Avinash Patil)*

*Executive President ANiS, Maharashtra*

Gist of the letter written to CM, Maharashtra by Avinash Patil assures that ANiS will continue its agitations peacefully till the arrests of all suspects.

■■■

## **A Critic's Lonely Quest:**

### **Revealing the Whole Truth about Mother Teresa**

Kai Schultz

Dr. Aroup Chatterjee, a London-based physician, published “Mother Teresa: The Final Verdict” in 2003, which cataloged evidence that the Missionaries of Charity ran inadequate facilities and often offered little comfort to those it was trying to help. Taking on a global icon of peace, faith and charity is not a task for everyone, or, really, hardly anyone at all. But that is what Dr. Aroup Chatterjee has spent a good part of his life doing as one of the most vocal critics of Mother Teresa.

Dr. Chatterjee, a 58-year-old physician, acknowledged that it was a mostly solitary pursuit. “I’m the lone Indian,” he said in an interview recently. “I had to devote so much time to her. I would have paid to do that. Well, I did pay to do that.”

His task is about to become that much tougher, of course, when Mother Teresa is declared a saint next month.

In truth, Dr. Chatterjee’s critique is as much or more about how the West perceives Mother Teresa as it is about her actual work. As the canonization approaches, Dr. Chatterjee hopes to renew a dialogue about her legacy in Kolkata, formerly Calcutta, where she began her services with the “poorest of the poor” in 1950.

Growing up, Dr. Chatterjee, a native of Kolkata, found himself bothered by the narrative surrounding Mother Teresa, beginning with the city’s depiction as one of the most desperate places on earth, a “black hole.”

Having been raised in the middle-class Kolkata neighborhood of Ballygunge in the 1950s and 1960s, Dr. Chatterjee said the city of his experience was cosmopolitan, even moneyed. “Every airline that existed in those days, they all came.”

As the capital of the British Indian Empire for nearly 140 years, Kolkata was considered one of India's crown jewels. When the British moved their headquarters to Delhi in 1911, Dr. Chatterjee acknowledged, the city began a slow decline in international prestige.

Dr. Chatterjee worked as a foot soldier for a leftist political party in the late 1970s and early 1980s, while he was studying at Kolkata Medical College, campaigning and sleeping in nearby slums. During a year as an intern, he also regularly saw patients from one of the city's oldest and "most dire" red-light districts.

"We used to see very serious abuse of women and children quite often," he said, noting that the city was still struggling to absorb an influx of refugees after the civil war in what was East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.

"I never even saw any nuns in those slums that I worked in," he said. "I think it's an imperialist venture of the Catholic Church against an Eastern population, an Eastern city, which has really driven horses and carriages through our prestige and our honor.

"I just thought that this myth had to be challenged," he added.

Over hundreds of hours of research, much of it cataloged in a book he published in 2003, Dr. Chatterjee said he found a "cult of suffering" in homes run by Mother Teresa's organization, the Missionaries of Charity, with children tied to beds and little to comfort dying patients but aspirin.

He and others said that Mother Teresa took her adherence to frugality and simplicity in her work to extremes, allowing practices like the reuse of hypodermic needles and tolerating primitive facilities that required patients to defecate in front of one another.

But it was not until he moved to the United Kingdom in 1985, eventually taking a job in a rural hospital, that he realized the reputation Kolkata had acquired in Western circles.

In 1994, Dr. Chatterjee contacted Bandung Productions, a company owned by the writer and filmmaker Tariq Ali. What started as a 12-minute phone pitch turned into an offer by Channel 4's commissioning editor to film an exposé of Mother Teresa's work. The social critic Christopher Hitchens was hired to present what would become "Hell's Angel," a highly skeptical documentary.

Over the next year, Dr. Chatterjee traveled the world meeting with volunteers, nuns and writers who were familiar with the Missionaries of Charity. In over a hundred interviews, Dr. Chatterjee heard volunteers describe how workers with limited medical training administered 10- to 20-year-old medicines to patients, and blankets stained with feces were washed in the same sink used to clean dishes.

In the past, when similar criticisms were made, the Missionaries of Charity typically did not deny the reports but said that the nuns were working on the matter. Today, they say, speech therapists and physiotherapists are regularly consulted to look after patients with physical and mental

disabilities. And nuns said they frequently take patients who require surgery and more complicated care to nearby hospitals.

“In Mother’s time, these physiotherapists, they were coming, but at that time, there weren’t as many available,” said Sunita Kumar, a spokeswoman for the Missionaries of Charity.

These days, Mrs. Kumar added, several nuns have undergone training to “spruce up their medical background,” and the general upkeep of facilities has improved.

Dr. Chatterjee agreed that after Mother Teresa’s death in 1997, homes run by the Missionaries of Charity began taking their hygiene practices more seriously. The reuse of needles, he said, was eliminated.

Over the years, as Dr. Chatterjee tried to make his case, campaigning for changes in the charity’s facilities, he said he began to feel Kolkatans turning against him.

“Like a complete nincompoop, I thought that people would absolutely fall over me with garlands and roses, people in Calcutta, if I came and told them that I’m going to settle the score and I’m going to expose this lady,” he said.

Part of this protection of Mother Teresa, Dr. Chatterjee believes, can be attributed to the Nobel Peace Prize she won in 1979. “Calcuttans have got this fascination with Nobel Prizes,” he said, adding that the city’s celebrated poet Rabindranath Tagore won Asia’s first Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. Others, he said, were simply afraid to speak out.

But Dr. Chatterjee said that Mother Teresa’s place in the Western canon was enough for some Indians to lionize her as part of an ingrained colonialist mind-set. “The West is saying she’s good, so she must be good,” he said.

When Indians have challenged aspects of Mother Teresa’s career, he said, it has often been to safeguard what some see as the progressiveness of her work, playing down the miracles and myths surrounding her.

“Because Calcuttans think that Mother Teresa is Western and she’s a Western icon, she’s very progressive,” he said. “And they do not associate her with miracles and mumbo jumbo and black magic just as they do not associate her with opposition to contraception and abortion.”

Leading up to the canonization, several Hindu nationalists have spoken out against Mother Teresa to different ends, arguing that her Missionaries of Charity pushed conversion on its patients. Dr. Chatterjee said he felt safer criticizing the nun with a nationalist party like the Bharatiya Janata Party in power.

As for the reception of his work among Western audiences, Dr. Chatterjee said there was an appetite mostly for the more sensational issues he had raised.

"They don't care about whether a third-world city's dignity or prestige has been hampered by an Albanian nun," he said. "So, obviously, they may be interested in the lies and the charlatans and the fraud that's going on, but the whole story, they're not interested in."

Asked if Mother Teresa's becoming a saint would deter him from his campaign, Dr. Chatterjee said he would continue his quest to right the record as long as it took.

"In my mind, the dialogue will never die, because I think the myth goes on and the issue goes on," he said. "I will not go away. It's as simple as that."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/27/world/asia/mother-teresa-critic.html>

Courtesy: The New York Times

■■■

## Mommie Dearest

***Pope Francis will make Mother Teresa - a fanatic, a fundamentalist, and a fraud - a saint.***

*Christopher Hitchens*

*(In 2003, Pope John Paul II approved the beatification of Mother Teresa. At the time, Christopher Hitchens called Mother Teresa "a fanatic, a fundamentalist, and a fraud," arguing that "even more will be poor and sick if her example is followed." On Friday, Pope Francis announced that he will make Mother Teresa a saint in 2016. Hitchens' original essay is republished below.)*

I think it was Macaulay who said that the Roman Catholic Church deserved great credit for, and owed its longevity to, its ability to handle and contain fanaticism. This rather oblique compliment belongs to a more serious age. What is so striking about the "beatification" of the woman who styled herself "Mother" Teresa is the abject surrender, on the part of the church, to the forces of showbiz, superstition, and populism.

It's the sheer tawdriness that strikes the eye first of all. It used to be that a person could not even be nominated for "beatification," the first step to "sainthood," until five years after his or her death. This was to guard against local or popular enthusiasm in the promotion of dubious characters. The pope nominated MT a year after her death in 1997. It also used to be that an apparatus of inquiry was set in train, including the scrutiny of an *advocatus diaboli* or "devil's advocate," to test any extraordinary claims. The pope has abolished this office and has created more instant saints than all his predecessors combined as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

As for the "miracle" that had to be attested, what can one say? Surely any respectable Catholic cringes with shame at the obviousness of the fakery. A Bengali woman named Monica Besra

claims that a beam of light emerged from a picture of MT, which she happened to have in her home, and relieved her of a cancerous tumor. Her physician, Dr. Ranjan Mustafi, says that she didn't have a cancerous tumor in the first place and that the tubercular cyst she did have was cured by a course of prescription medicine. Was he interviewed by the Vatican's investigators? No. (As it happens, I myself was interviewed by them but only in the most perfunctory way. The procedure still does demand a show of consultation with doubters, and a show of consultation was what, in this case, it got.)

According to an uncontradicted report in the Italian paper *L'Eco di Bergamo*, the Vatican's secretary of state sent a letter to senior cardinals in June, asking on behalf of the pope whether they favored making MT a saint right away. The pope's clear intention has been to speed the process up in order to perform the ceremony in his own lifetime. The response was in the negative, according to Father Brian Kolodiejchuk, the Canadian priest who has acted as postulator or advocate for the "canonization." But the damage, to such integrity as the process possesses, has already been done.

During the deliberations over the Second Vatican Council, under the stewardship of Pope John XXIII, MT was to the fore in opposing all suggestions of reform. What was needed, she maintained, was more work and more faith, not doctrinal revision. Her position was ultra-reactionary and fundamentalist even in orthodox Catholic terms. Believers are indeed enjoined to abhor and eschew abortion, but they are not required to affirm that abortion is "the greatest destroyer of peace," as MT fantastically asserted to a dumbfounded audience when receiving the Nobel Peace Prize.\* Believers are likewise enjoined to abhor and eschew divorce, but they are not required to insist that a ban on divorce and remarriage be a part of the state constitution, as MT demanded in a referendum in Ireland (which her side narrowly lost) in 1996. Later in that same year, she told *Ladies' Home Journal* that she was pleased by the divorce of her friend Princess Diana, because the marriage had so obviously been an unhappy one ...

This returns us to the medieval corruption of the church, which sold indulgences to the rich while preaching hellfire and continence to the poor. MT was not a friend of the poor. She was a friend of *poverty*. She said that suffering was a gift from God. She spent her life opposing the only known cure for poverty, which is the empowerment of women and the emancipation of them from a livestock version of compulsory reproduction. And she was a friend to the worst of the rich, taking misappropriated money from the atrocious Duvalier family in Haiti (whose rule she praised in return) and from Charles Keating of the Lincoln Savings and Loan. Where did that money, and all the other donations, go? The primitive hospice in Calcutta was as run down when she died as it always had been—she preferred California clinics when she got sick herself—and her order always refused to publish any audit. But we have her own claim that she opened 500 convents in more than a hundred countries, all bearing the name of her own order. Excuse me, but this is modesty and humility?

The rich world has a poor conscience, and many people liked to alleviate their own unease by sending money to a woman who seemed like an activist for "the poorest of the poor." People do not like to admit that they have been gulled or conned, so a vested interest in the myth was permitted to arise, and a lazy media never bothered to ask any follow-up questions. Many volunteers who went to Calcutta came back abruptly disillusioned by the stern ideology and poverty-loving practice of the "Missionaries of Charity," but they had no audience for their story. George Orwell's admonition in his essay on Gandhi—that saints should always be presumed guilty until proved innocent—was drowned in a Niagara of soft-hearted, soft-headed, and uninquiring propaganda.

One of the curses of India, as of other poor countries, is the quack medicine man, who fleeces the sufferer by promises of miraculous healing. Sunday was a great day for these parasites, who saw their crummy methods endorsed by his holiness and given a more or less free ride in the international press. Forgotten were the elementary rules of logic, that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence and that what can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence. More than that, we witnessed the elevation and consecration of extreme dogmatism, blinkered faith, and the cult of a mediocre human personality. Many more people are poor and sick because of the life of MT: Even more will be poor and sick if her example is followed. She was a fanatic, a fundamentalist, and a fraud, and a church that officially protects those who violate the innocent has given us another clear sign of where it truly stands on moral and ethical questions.

**Correction, Oct. 21, 2003:** *This piece originally claimed that in her Nobel Peace Prize lecture, Mother Teresa called abortion and contraception the greatest threats to world peace. In that speech Mother Teresa did call abortion "the greatest destroyer of peace." But she did not much discuss contraception, except to praise "natural" family planning.*

[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/fighting\\_words/2003/10/mommie\\_dearest.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fighting_words/2003/10/mommie_dearest.html)

Courtesy: slate.com

■■■

## Weaning People off Religious Belief

Michael Shermer

*(One day, people will look back on humanity's religious past and laugh, says skeptic and science writer Michael Shermer. That's not merely evidenced by the fact that atheists are among the most rapidly growing minority groups in American society, but also because Islam will sooner or later experience the same kind of secular reform we've seen in Christianity and Judaism.)*

I don't think the day is coming soon when we'll look back that people who believe in God, you know, that was a silly age, although some of us look at this that way now. But clearly the numbers are, you know — we're not in the majority yet but the fastest growing group, the fastest growing religious group so called is the nones. The N – O – N – E – S people. Check the book for no religious affiliation. Now they're not necessarily atheist or agnostics or skeptics, but they are not affiliated with a religion. And so on one level, I don't care what somebody believes as long as they

leave me alone and they don't interfere with my rights. They don't try to kill me and bother me. I mean the JWs, the Jehovah Witnesses, they come to my door once in a while. The Mormons come to my door once in a while. It's kind of amusing. I invite them in and give them a copy of Skeptic magazine and they're like uh, we better call the head guy to come down here. That's relatively harmless, but clearly we see with Islam and the problem of Islamic terrorism, religion has to be reformed. It absolutely does.

I don't worry about the Jains or Jews or most Christians causing societal problems anymore because they've gone through the reformation enlightenment, age of reason, the scientific revolution. They came out the other side mostly nonviolent. And Islam hasn't — so I think if we reform Islam and then start to wean people off belief in the supernatural altogether. You can't do it by fiat, but we can inculcate it into people's thinking critical thinking about everything including God. Throw God into the mix. That's just another supernatural belief. And that's what those of us who work in this area are trying to do. You know there are different strategies. You can be aggressive about it like Richard Dawkins and Hitch [Christopher Hitchens]. You know they're pretty anti-theist. That works in some cases, but not other cases. Other areas people need to be reeled in slowly, gently. But that's just a sales and marketing problem, you know. How should we sell our product best? Should we call it this or we use the red logo or the blue logo? You sort of product test those things and see what works. But we all share this overall goal. In a century or two, I think it's possible no one will believe in God anymore or almost no one. And that will be good for society.

The greatest evil in the world is not so much religion (which fundamentally stands for the illusion of cosmic importance), but rather progress, which stands for the illusion of earthly importance (together with other civilized systems like money and nations). The most religious societies were hunter-gatherer ones, where pretty much every aspect of life was deeply imbued with religious significance (spirits, ancestors, all the stuff of animism) and so the ratio of cosmic to earthly importance was one that kept humans exactly in the state they belong: in small numbers, static, not destroying nature too much, and using their mind for the survival tasks for which their brain supposedly evolved.

These 100,000 years plus of sustainable living (which every other species can do btw) are the greatest achievement of humanity, dwarfing any later artistic or scientific accomplishments. With the invention of agriculture and surplus, you had population growth and the creation of class societies, and so the ratio began to shift in favor of earthly, rather than cosmic importance. Nation states, money, goods, massive earthly status began to become more important. Since earthly importance/legacy is less satisfying than cosmic importance/literal immortality -it does less to quell our fear of animal insignificance/death- (which is the very reason for pursuing such importance at all), the drive for change and progress was set in motion. And thus the greatest evil, the destruction of countless species was set in motion as well.



Whereas even the bloodiest human wars and genocides, including religious ones, have only killed a small percentage of the 1 species we call Homo Sapiens, you now had the destruction of whole species by human civilization: The Holocene extinction, beginning with agriculture and civilization itself. What more befitting transcendence of our animal finitude and insignificance than the denial of nature itself - if not by religious myth, by material destruction and domination. As the illusion of earthly importance continued its crawl, it reached a juncture in human history in which it overcame various important aspects of religious and cultural tradition.

The age of enlightenment and the industrial revolution had begun. We began, more than ever, to seek in the idea of progress what theists had found in the idea of providence: an assurance that history need not be meaningless. With this loss of religious faith, we became more averse at the notion of regression in earthly affairs, wanting to believe that history is not cyclic but, indeed, progressive, and that our personal role and legacy are thus positive here on earth (symbolic, as opposed to literal immortality).

Various technological and medical advances led to a decrease in infant mortality and a lengthening of lifespan, which in turn led to the "hockey stick" population explosion, with ever more billions of people desiring to also taste the fruits of increased material progress. This led to what is now termed "The Sixth Extinction". This catastrophic event once and for all provided proof that the illusion of progress had produced the greatest of regresses for humanity: a decrease in long term survival prospects and moral status - as whatever improvements in human life and relations had taken place (reduction of disease, infant mortality, poverty, slavery, violence, gender and race relations etc) were rendered insignificant as compared to the ecocide of thousands upon thousands of species, whose collective value far surpasses that of humanity itself. And whatever artistic or scientific feats humans had accomplished in this short period, were thoroughly trounced by the 100,000 years of sustainable living (and prospects for 100s of 1000s more) that were afforded by the most primitive and non-progressive of lifestyles.

*Courtesy: The Skeptic*



## **State must not organize Religious festivals**

*Ram Puniyani*

After staging the Yoga on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2015 on Raj Path, Delhi, Modi Sarkar has planned to celebrate Rakhi, Raksha Bandhan at a grand scale in late August. This plan has full approval of its parent organization, the RSS. Now a Hindu religious festival will be given the status of a national festival so blatantly. It surely is indication of the type of deeper agenda of narrow nationalism this Government has in mind?

As such this festival Raksha Bandhan stands for 'bond of protection' and is amongst the very popular festivals, primarily celebrated by Hindus, Jains and some Sikhs. There are legends which point to the innovative use of this festival for goals which are beyond the religious identity so to say. There is a tale of Rani Karnavati of Chittor sending a Rakhi to emperor Humayun when she was faced with the attack by Bahadur Shah (1535), the Sultan of Gujarat. Touched by the gesture of the Hindu queen the emperor set off to defend her, but it was too late to defend Chittor by the time he reached there. This Rajasthani narration is doubted by many historians. Whatever be the truth this tale does reflect the Hindu Muslim amity in medieval times, it does reflect the Ganga Jumani tehzeeb (syncretic culture) which was the kernel of the sub continent.

Another legend is the invocation of Rakhi by Guru Rabindranath Tagore in the aftermath of the partition of Bengal by the British (1905) on communal lines. To register the protest against British policy and to cement the bonds between the two major religious communities, the poet laureate gave the call of celebrating Raksha bandhan as a bond of unity between Hindus and Muslims. This was also a time when the communal forces had begun articulating the sectarian mindset, trying to promote aversion for the 'other' community. While the communalists from both the communities went on articulating hatred against 'other' community, this type of incidents show the deeper bonds which prevailed amongst Hindus and Muslims during the freedom movement, these were the bonds which reflected Indian Nationalism at social level.

There are multiple other instances where Rakhi has acted as a symbol of love and unity cutting across social groups, kingdoms and clans. While all this is in place, the fact is that primarily Rakhi is reflection of patriarchal relations. Here the sister is tying the thread on the wrist of her brother wishing for his well being. The brother in turn is pledging to *protect* her all her life.

While recognizing the other lovely narrations, like 'Rakhi brother' (one who is not a biological brother but becomes brother after Rakhi is tied) etc. the core of the festival does remain structured around gender equations of prevalent from feudal times. Its meaning and tenor has not changed so far despite the development of industrial-democratic society and despite the concept of equality of women to coming to fore. It is unnecessary to judge the past society by the values of the present times, but it all the same calls for revision in the symbols and rituals in the direction in which we aspire to go. The overdue just demand for gender equality is what we need. Today the deeper meaning of Rakhi needs to be understood before carrying on with it in the same form.

Many Hindutva ideologues are harping on the point that this festival empowers the woman to choose her brother, who is not a biological one. *Brother* in present equations stands for protection along with control as well while what women want is parity, the freedom to choose their way of life and their life partner. The intriguing fact of the rise of Khap Panchayats with the rise of communal politics needs to be underlined. Such social groups are intimidating and attacking the couples who make their own choices in matters of selection of life partners. A promotion of this festival with

inherent gender hierarchy means reinforcing curbs on freedom of women. Many religious festivals are being supported and organized in state like Andhra also.

Primarily festivals of this type are social. The Holi, Divalis, Eid, Christmas are social event of joy, celebration. Many politicians and organization celebrate it at social-community level. Social festivals are family-community events. Two major questions which the decision of the Modi Sarkar raises are, one why a Hindu festival is being presented as a national festival, and why the Government should come forward to promote *social* festivals?. The answer to this lies in the fact that this government is having the agenda of Hindu nationalism and so they are walking an extra mile to promote a Hindu festival as a national festival. National festivals have to be restricted to the one's which are related to freedom movement, a phenomenon, which built us as an Indian nation.

In a plural society one religion cannot be singled out to become the national religion and a secular state does not go in for organizing the celebration of religious festivals, majority or minority. Government should not come in the arena of social festivals; communities are already doing that. It seems this government wants to give a subtle message of the deeper gender related agenda; that of the subordination of women as well through this festival. All narrow nationalisms and ideologies which take recourse to the label of religion or race have this agenda inherent in them. Be it Christian fundamentalism, Islamic fundamentalism or Hindu Fundamentalism, they all take recourse to some or the other pretext from the past or present to restrict the freedom, equality of women.

In a society where Khap Panchayats are becoming more visible, what is needed is the program to empower women for economic self sufficiency and the promotion of an emotional build up which looks at both the genders on par. What should be promoted is the tendency for mutual help and coordination amongst siblings where they support each other on par in building their lives around their free choices. The deeper agenda of RSS, upholding patriarchal mind set is very well reflected in the celebration of this festival. Perpetuation of patriarchal norms is inherent in the very nomenclature of RSS. The term Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is masculine (Swayam, self) in contrast to its women's organization which is Rashtra Sevika Samiti, sans the *swayam*, the 'being'. Women's *being* is missing in this scheme of things and that's what is aimed to be strengthened by such festivals being organized at national level. The innocuous looking things do have deeper inherent meaning and agenda!

■■■

## The 14 Characteristics of Fascism

While a debate is on if we are facing Fascism in India or not, we are reproducing here 14 Characteristics of Fascism. You can compare the characteristics with Indian political scenario and decide for yourself.

Political scientist Dr. Lawrence Britt studying the fascist regimes of Hitler (Germany), Mussolini (Italy), Franco (Spain), Suharto (Indonesia), and Pinochet (Chile), Dr. Britt found they all had 14 elements in common. He calls these the identifying characteristics of fascism.

The 14 characteristics are:

**1. Powerful and Continuing Nationalism**

Fascist regimes tend to make constant use of patriotic mottos, slogans, symbols, songs, and other paraphernalia. Flags are seen everywhere, as are flag symbols on clothing and in public displays.

**2. Disdain for the Recognition of Human Rights**

Because of fear of enemies and the need for security, the people in fascist regimes are persuaded that human rights can be ignored in certain cases because of “need.” The people tend to look the other way or even approve of torture, summary executions, assassinations, long incarcerations of prisoners, etc.

**3. Identification of Enemies/Scapegoats as a Unifying Cause.**

The people are rallied into a unifying patriotic frenzy over the need to eliminate a perceived common threat or foe: racial, ethnic or religious minorities; liberals; communists; socialists, terrorists, etc.

**4. Supremacy of the Military**

Even when there are widespread domestic problems, the military is given a disproportionate amount of government funding, and the domestic agenda is neglected. Soldiers and military service are glamorized.

**5. Rampant Sexism**

The governments of fascist nations tend to be almost exclusively male dominated. Under fascist regimes, traditional gender roles are made more rigid. Opposition to abortion is high, as is homophobia and antigay legislation and national policy.

**6. Controlled Mass Media**

Sometimes media is directly controlled by the government, but in other cases, the media is indirectly controlled by government regulation, or sympathetic media spokespeople and executives. Censorship, especially in war time, is very common.

**7. Obsession with National Security**

Fear is used as a motivational tool by the government over the masses.

**8. Religion and Government are Intertwined**

Governments in fascist nations tend to use the most common religion in the nation as a tool to manipulate public opinion. Religious rhetoric and terminology is common from government leaders, even when the major tenets of the religion are diametrically opposed to the government’s policies or actions.

**9. Corporate Power is Protected**

The industrial and business aristocracy of a fascist nation often are the ones who put the government leaders into power, creating a mutually beneficial business/ government relationship and power elite.

#### **10. Labor Power is Suppressed**

Because the organizing power of labor is the only real threat to a fascist government, labor unions are either eliminated entirely, or are severely suppressed.

#### **11. Disdain for Intellectuals and the Arts**

Fascist nations tend to promote and tolerate open hostility to higher education, and academia. It is not uncommon for professors and other academics to be censored or even arrested. Free expression in the arts is openly attacked, and governments often refuse to fund the arts.

#### **12. Obsession with Crime and Punishment**

Under fascist regimes, the police are given almost limitless power to enforce laws. The people are often willing to overlook police abuses and even forego civil liberties in the name of patriotism. There is often a national police force with virtually unlimited power in fascist nations

#### **13. Rampant Cronyism and Corruption**

Fascist regimes almost always are governed by groups of friends and associates who appoint each other to government positions and use governmental power and authority to protect their friends from accountability. It is not uncommon in fascist regimes for national resources and even treasures to be appropriated or even outright stolen by government leaders.

#### **14. Fraudulent Elections**

Sometimes elections in fascist nations are a complete sham. Other times elections are manipulated by smear campaigns against or even assassination of opposition candidates, use of legislation to control voting numbers or political district boundaries, and manipulation of the media. Fascist nations also typically use their judiciaries to manipulate or control elections.

<http://www.csss-isl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/SAN-December-2015-January-2016-new-1.pdf>

*Courtesy: Secular Action Network*

